

## Russian Special

**This year, the Centre for Social Action is starting two major contracts in Russia and completing a third. This newsletter therefore highlights the experiences of our project staff who have been braving the Russian winter to visit cities and projects east of Moscow, in Siberia and beyond.**

### Five go on a restorative justice adventure

**The DMU Restorative Justice Team went on a familiarisation visit to Russia in January, to visit the people and places where they will be working over the next three years. The 13 days of the trip involved visits to the pilot sites in Moscow, Tyumen and Dzerzhinsk, meetings with our Russian project partners The Center for Legal and Judicial Reform and attendance at conferences and other opportunities for discussion with criminal justice agencies in the Russian Federation. The following describes some of their collective impressions of the trip.**

**Brian Williams:** When we wrote the bid for the funding to undertake the restorative justice project in Russia, we thought it would be important for the key people at DMU to make an early visit to see the situation on the ground in Russia. Of course we had no idea at that stage what this would involve. We simply included the cost of airfares, accommodation and subsistence. In January, five of us actually made the visit, and it was a memorable trip. Project staff Eamonn Keenan and Devinder Curry split up for the visits to the pilot sites, each leading a mini-delegation: I went to Dzerzhinsk, a fairly grim

city dominated by the chemical industry, with Devinder and Michelle Byrne. To my surprise, this was the highlight of the trip for me. We met a great team of project staff and volunteers, who



The research team and a judge in Moscow

were extremely keen and knowledgeable. They worked hard to identify their further training needs and to help us decide who should join the first study tour to the UK. We also met people from all the agencies the project is collaborating with, including a number of busy prosecutors. (One reason we knew they were busy is that our meetings were interrupted by several pauses while the Prokuratura member on duty went off to arrest people!). After a very full schedule, we returned to Moscow on the night train and slept most of the following day, a Sunday.

**Devinder Curry:** From my own perspective the most interesting and rewarding aspect of the visit was the opportunity to travel to Dzerzhinsk in the Nizhny Novgorod region with two other members of the team. Dzerzhinsk is a city of 300,000 people and it is located around 400 kilometres south west of Moscow. From speaking with people there it epitomizes the opportunities and problems created by Russia's transition from communism to democracy. During Soviet times the town was synonymous with a thriving chemical industry but since the fall of communism a number of these factories have closed, resulting in high unemployment and a crime rate higher than the Russian national average. There are problems of drug addiction (mostly glue sniffing, as heroin and cocaine are more expensive than in Britain) and alcohol abuse. Truancy from school, whilst small by British comparisons, is also a new and disturbing development.

Whilst most people we spoke to (and they may not be representative) talk of the opportunities offered by capitalism, there were also concerns about the loss of security that accompanied the decline of the communist system. One member of a juvenile justice agency lamented the decline of the communist system, which he said had

been accompanied by an increasing youth crime rate. He also added, without irony, that the rise in local crime therefore needed to be seen as one of the contributions that democracy and capitalism had made to Russian society!

Notwithstanding these comments, I was impressed by the multi-agency working arrangements that appeared to exist in Dzerzhinsk between the local Restorative Justice project, the Courts, the Prokuratura and the Police, and the enthusiasm with which other agencies seemed to be embracing restorative justice ideas, e.g. the local education department. In addition staff at the local Restorative Justice project were open to new ideas and wanted to learn more from our experiences of using Restorative Justice in Britain. A visit to a local youth club also allowed us the opportunity to meet with some teenagers and for me to practise my very rusty table tennis skills against them!

**Eamonn Keenan:** Whilst my colleagues went to Dzerzhinsk, Vince Mercer and I visited Tyumen, a city of about 500,000 people in Western Siberia about 1000 miles east of Moscow. I was keen to return having visited in October 2002 and was impressed with the people and the city. Whilst not a beautiful city it is obviously doing well economically, with a number of new buildings contrasting with the traditional old small wooden buildings that go back to the 18th century.

The pilot project has developed from an earlier piece of mediation work with schools and youth organisations developed by the CLJR and the local group. We were very impressed with the local organisation Community Foundation Tyumen, which has supported the development of Restorative Justice. The Project co-ordinator Elena and the two mediators, Olga and Galina, also have the support of a number of local people

including Ruslan, who provides technical legal information. Their enthusiasm and dedication to the project was very impressive. We will look forward to working with them.

One of the highlights in Tyumen was a round table with members of the Prokuratura's Office and Militia, all of whom were female and obviously keen to start the project and learn more about Restorative Justice. The local press interviewed us and the local television company also attended the meeting.

We also had time to meet informally with people – Siberian informality has a lot going for it – and were treated to some traditional Siberian practices on our last evening involving a group outing to hot spas out in the middle of the grey birch forests, a barbecue and some voluntary rolling around in the snow. One of our party braved the minus 14 elements in this way, the other being a serious coward declined!

**Brian Williams:** There was very little time for sightseeing in Moscow, but we did get to go to the Bolshoi theatre and to take a minibus tour, which included a walk in Red Square – an incredibly impressive place. A conference was organised to coincide with our visit, and I had the rather nerve-wracking experience of giving a lecture (in English, with an interpreter standing at the microphone while I stood redundantly next to her) at this event, with an audience of members of the Institute of State and Law of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Compared to that, the TV interview was a piece of cake. We also visited a youth club, which was much better resourced than the one we went to in Dzerzhinsk.

We spent an afternoon at the central office of the Prokuratura, the much more powerful equivalent of our Crown Prosecution Service. For this, the entire senior staff group turned out for a

discussion of our project and the different legal systems in the two countries. We were made very welcome, there and everywhere we went.

**Devinder Curry:** During the remainder of our time in Moscow we became frequent customers of a coffee shop located close to the offices of CLJR! There were opportunities to meet with a number of people interested in Restorative Justice ideas including a local Judge and the Police, as well as the chance to meet with other NGOs, e.g. Penal Reform International, to learn from their experiences of encouraging legislative change in Russia. In addition, there was an invitation for myself and Eamonn Keenan to speak on Radio Russia about Restorative Justice and youth justice reform in Britain, as part of a radio programme broadcast nationally about alternatives to prison punishment. There seemed to be a genuine interest in the youth justice reforms introduced in this country and the centre-stage that restorative justice seems to play in these.

**Brian Williams:** Overall, the visit was extremely helpful in building our knowledge and understanding of the Russian criminal justice system, and of the obstacles which stand in the way of the introduction of restorative justice and a separate juvenile justice system. Our partners in the Center for Legal and Judicial Reform accompanied us for most of the programme, and they prepared and employed interpreters for us. We were able to see at first hand the enormous amount of work they have already done to ensure that the project is a success. We made a number of friends who we will look forward to meeting again as the project progresses.

## Samara Disability and Empowerment Project

**The new disability agency – IDEA – based within the Centre for Social Action, has been awarded a two-and-a-half-year contract to work with disability organisations in the Russian city and oblast of Samara, which is south and east of Moscow, not far from the northern borders of Kazakhstan.**

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**Michael Turner, IDEA consultant, describes the background to the project and two recent trips to Samara, in December and January, with fellow IDEA consultant Jacqui James and her husband and personal assistant Max James.**

There's something very disconcerting about arriving in Samara in the winter. The airport sits on its own out in the countryside between the two main cities of the region, making it feel like you are arriving in the middle of nowhere, but to a place nevertheless that glows under its blanket of snow. But most disconcerting still is moving four hours ahead to the local time, which plunges you into darkness in the last half hour of the flight and leaves you feeling like it's the middle of the night, while your body clock insists it's just past lunch-time.

This is a feeling I've been getting used to, with January bringing the second trip to Samara in two months, with Jacqui James and Max, for the inception phase of the Disability and Empowerment Project. This is funded by the Department for International Development (DfID) and is being carried out by the International Disability Equality Agency (IDEA), a new arm of the Centre for Social Action. IDEA has four

co-directors, all of whom are disabled people, who have been working in international development. They are: CSA director Mark Harrison; consultant and activist Dr Bill Albert; Jacqui James and myself, who are also the workers on the Samara project.

Our first visit to Samara in December was essentially for re-familiarisation and an opportunity to start discussing our plans for the project. We had meetings with the disability NGOs in Samara City, Desnitsa and Ravenstvo, the regional NGO support group Povolzje and the regional and city departments for social protection. We also did the two-hour trip to the second city of the region, Tolghatti, to meet with the NGOs Klio and Tolghatti Centre for Independent Living, the Tolghatti Community Foundation and the city's department for social protection. On the last day of the visit everyone that we had seen attended a round-table discussion about the project.



Members of disability organisations at the Round Table event Desnitsa, Samara

The follow up trip in January was more complicated. We returned to Samara for the first meeting of the Strategy Group that will steer the project and meetings with Desnitsa and Povolzje about the financial arrangements for the local work on the project. From Samara we flew to Nizhny Novgorod to make initial contacts with disability NGOs and the department for social protection about the dissemination phase of the project. The last few days were spent in Moscow for meetings with DfID staff at the embassy, with the Deputy Minister at the Ministry for Labour and Social Development and the national disability NGO Perspektiva about their role in the dissemination phase of the project.

## Establishing the project

The initial concept of IDEA was developed some time ago by Mark, Bill and Jacqui, with the establishment of the Disability and Empowerment Project providing the impetus to put the proposal

into action. Another project is already underway in Mozambique and others are being set up in Bulgaria and Malta.

It was the design phase of the Disability and Empowerment Project two years ago that brought me into the picture. My background was in research and development projects in the disability field in the UK, with the nearest thing to international work being a few trips to Edinburgh. Jacqui has a much more extensive track record in international projects and worked for two years with Oxfam in Bosnia, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. She is also a member of the International Committee of the British Council of Disabled People and is secretary for Disabled Peoples International (DPI) Europe.

We attended a round-table meeting convened by DfID in London early in 2000, to discuss its plans to support work based on a social approach to disability. The meeting involved a fairly broad discussion on disability issues and the UK, the

international disability movement and approaches to development work with disabled people.

A few weeks after that I was asked to go back to another meeting with DfID's project team and Jacqui to talk about the next stage of the work and about making a visit to Russia. I don't think the surprise of this has ever quite worn off, even now that trips to Samara are becoming almost routine.

In many ways the project represents a new departure for DfID, in that it will work primarily through NGOs rather than the state sector. Developing the project from its design phase was made even more complex by the fact that it needed to work through, and therefore distribute resources through, a group of organisations. To address this issue the design phase included a study tour to the UK in January 2001 for representatives from the key organisations and the social protection departments.

This served three purposes. It introduced participants to good practice here in the UK, enabled them to begin to develop stronger working relationships with each other, and gave them the opportunity to work out how the project could operate in a way that would be acceptable to DfID. The result was the proposal that the project would be controlled by a group of representatives from the organisations run by disabled people and that the budget would be held by Desnitsa, the most well-established of the groups involved. Beyond this, a wider group with representatives of the social protection departments, NGOs and other interested parties would be established.

Two years on and we are at last putting the plan into action. It's been a long haul, with the project being on and then off while DfID undertook a

review of its work in Russia. The project has been scaled down substantially, but we are pleased that it is now happening and are confident that it will be the start of many projects for DfID based on the social model of disability.

## **Travelling hopefully... as a disabled person**

Travel is a major issue for all disabled people. A simple trip up the road to the shops can be a major logistical exercise. International travel presents these problems tenfold. The arrangements that Jacqui needs as a wheelchair user are not actually all that complicated, but for some reason the travel agents and airlines just don't seem able to take them in. Requests made to the travel agent often don't get communicated to the airline, so you go through them all again at check in; they don't tell the staff at the gate, so you then get a second repeat. Occasionally it does have advantages – I was moved to a club class seat when my request for an aisle seat was messed up on a return flight from Mozambique last summer – but it's generally a pain in the neck. This is especially the case with flights to Samara, which require an early morning hop to Frankfurt to pick up our main flight, when all you really want to do is get onto the plane and go back to sleep.

If things are difficult at airports like Heathrow and Frankfurt, which should be able to do better, it's perhaps understandable that facilities at Samara Airport, where embarkation and disembarkation takes place on the tarmac (in temperatures as low as -30°), are less advanced. In most places where this happens, airport staff provide a small lifting chair (like the fire evacuation chairs in many office buildings) to carry people off the

aircraft, but even this was not available on our first visit in December. This left Jacqui's husband and personal assistant, Max, to carry her down the stairs off the plane. We then got to travel through the airport in their dilapidated little ambulance, wondering whether it would be better to freeze to death or be poisoned by the fumes from the heater, and meet our translator, Oxana, and our minibus in the car park. (I suspect that arriving in this way adds to my disconcertion – we miss out on the rite of passage through the airport terminal and spend the best part of two hours in darkness between leaving the plane and arriving at the hotel).

Fortunately, when we returned in January a lifting chair had been found – probably as a result of Max's persistent cajoling of Lufthansa, which manages to be both friendly yet forceful. However, Max still had to do some lifting as our second visit included internal flights from Samara to Nizhny Novgorod, and then on to Moscow.

Finding accessible hotels is another issue for trips. In Samara we are now regulars at the National, a municipal hotel which has lots of Russian character and makes you feel like you are back in the 1950s. It's about the only hotel in Samara with a lift, although it's only just big enough for Jacqui's wheelchair. When we went to Nizhny Novgorod we were obliged to stay at a very modern four-star hotel as it was the only accessible hotel in the city.

We are also prone to the problems of other travellers and experienced the nightmare of lost luggage on our first trip in December. Our cases went astray between our connecting flights on the Friday but we were promised them on the next flight on Sunday. There was no great surprise when they did not turn up. We were told

that they had been sent to Moscow, where staff had not known what to do with them, took a guess at where they might be going and sent them on to Zurich. By the time they arrived on Tuesday evening it was hardly worth unpacking prior to our return on Friday (my case had been bashed about so much that it could only be half opened anyway).

## Russian retail experiences

The upshot of this was that we had to spend a proportion of our first visit shopping, although Jacqui saw this very much as an opportunity rather than a problem. However, dedicated professionals that we are, we used this to do some action research into the accessibility of commercial and retail venues for interactions between vendors (shops) and purchasers and paid particular attention to the presence of disabled people.

Accessibility was variable; several of the shopping centres were not accessible and those that were accessible had their problems. It seemed that even where there is an awareness of the need to provide access there was a lack of knowledge about how to do this effectively, in terms of ensuring ramps are not too steep and the doors are wide enough etc. One very modern shopping centre did not have a public lift, and when we asked to use the goods lift we met with refusal and the stern face of Russian bureaucracy (which is a great contrast with the warmth and hospitality of many Russian people). It is also important to remember that the natural environment in Russia in winter just isn't very accessible. All that snow is very difficult (and messy) for wheelchair users and I was pleased to get away with only slipping over once.

Disabled people were certainly not greatly in evidence. When I went off on my own to allow Jacqui and Max the delights of conjugal shopping, I had a strong feeling that a lone disabled person was something unusual – and that perhaps my efforts to find a pair of trousers the right size made a small contribution to the raising of disability awareness in Russia.

While it is not very scientific, looking for evidence of the participation of disabled people in everyday activities like shopping, does provide an indicator of the situation of disabled people in society. I can remember visiting the United States in the early 1990s and being struck by the greater presence of disabled people; I think that disabled people are now much more evident in Britain than they were 10 years ago.

It is to be hoped that the same will be true of Samara in a few years. We will have to arrange for Lufthansa to lose our luggage again towards the end of the project so that we can repeat the exercise.

## Supporting Disability NGOs

The project itself will be working towards this aim, and evidence of more disabled people taking part in everyday life is one of the measures of success in the project's log frame. Disabled people in the Samara region, and particularly in the main cities of Samara and Tolghatti, are already very well organised and addressing a range of disability issues. The key organisations are Desnitsa, Ravenstvo, Klio, Tolghatti Centre for Independent Living and two organisations run by the parents of disabled children.

Supporting these disability NGOs to continue and develop their work and to build on their

existing good relations with the statutory sector and wider NGO sector is the key aim of the project. Other key players include the regional support group for NGOs, Povolzje, which has been very supportive of the project, and the various branches of the regional and city-based social protection departments, all of whom are keen to see positive outcomes of the project.

There will be one further visit to Samara for the inception phase in March to finalise the project action plan and log frame for the project. We were very fortunate to find that the translator from the design phase, Oxana Brovchenko, was available to take on the role of project administrator/translator in Samara. Oxana's experience from the design phase means that she is very familiar with the issues we are working on, with the result that we are able to rely on her for accurate and sensitive translation. For example, instead of using the standard Russian word for disabled people, invalid, she will use the term that Russian disabled people use, which translates as people of reduced ability.

Oxana's organisational abilities are also important. She has been invaluable in helping with arrangements for visits – and without her efforts Lufthansa would probably still be despatching our luggage on random trips around the globe.

The first visit in December was essentially a re-familiarisation visit, during which we reacquainted ourselves with everyone involved and put forward our plans for the project and sought their input. The delay in starting the project certainly had an impact in terms of loss of momentum but the pace has picked up rapidly and by the time of our second visit in January we

were ready to hold an initial meeting of the Strategy Group that will steer the project.

This group will be looking at the exact activities that will take place in the course of the two years of the implementation phase. The plans that IDEA put to DfID in its project proposal included training on issues such as techniques of disability equality and social action training; NGO management; technical aspects of access and working with designers and planners to improve access; and working with the media. Other proposed activities include the production of a series of good practice guides and a video, with a festival around disability rights planned for the final stages of the project.

Dissemination is a key part of the project, and we are already looking at ways to share the results around Russia. Discussions are underway with Perspectiva, a national NGO of disabled people, about the part it can play in this through

training and other possible events. There will also be focussed dissemination in Nizhny Novgorod, and our visit there in January revealed a strong desire for support with work on disability rights and empowerment. Disabled people are organising and working together in Nizhny, but they do not yet have the support and interest of the authorities that the groups in Samara have developed, so the dissemination could have some very positive results there.

Hopefully the project's impact will spread from Samara to Nizhny and beyond. Two years feels like a very short time in which to be aiming to achieve such a lot – ironically it's the same amount of time that it took to get the project approved. We have to look at it as a start for our involvement in the work of disabled people in Russia, and hope that among other outcomes, the project will show DfID the value of supporting this type of work with disabled people.



Jaqui and Michael with members of the Centre for Independent Living, Tolghetti

# Supporting vulnerable children and families in Ekaterinburg and Sverdlovsk

Claire Warrington, social work advisor and Lena Kandoba project assistant and interpreter with EveryChild have been actively involved in the transforming childcare project in Ekaterinburg and the Sverdlovsk region of Russia, which is located east of the Urals. In the piece that follows they describe the work of the Centre for Social Action on this project in more detail and Lena gives a personal account of taking part in the training the trainers course and subsequently using social action methods to train other groups.

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Ian Boulton and Louise Wilcox with four members of the Ekaterinburg team at the project office

The Centre for Social Action and members of a UK consortium including EveryChild and The Children's Society, have been providing expertise for the DfID funded project "Supporting vulnerable children and families in Ekaterinburg and the Sverdlovsk Oblast" over the last three years. The 3½ year project began in April 2000 and was divided into three phases; inception, implementation and dissemination. We are now preparing for the final phase of widespread dissemination of learning.

The Centre's work began in the inception phase with the development of the Ministerial Steering Committee and support to practitioners in the three pilot sites. This was to enable creative, needs based thinking about the services needed locally, which has successfully led to real ownership of new services and a commitment to achieving long term sustainability. Possibly because Ekaterinburg was a closed city during the soviet years, the practitioners are very open and enthusiastic about new developments and the challenges brought about as a result of our partnership.

As well as providing training and development in many areas of the project, one of the Centre's major achievements has been the training of over 35 key personnel as social action trainers. The Training the Trainers course was the springboard for workshops in a conference for officials in the Commission of Minors and the Guardianship body, who are the key decision makers for vulnerable children and families.

Lena Kandoba became one of the social action trainers and describes her experience of the course as follows:

"I was trained as a trainer as part of the project in Ekaterinburg. I have also been a training

participant so have experienced the process from both sides. The social action method of training is new to us in Russia, and when people take part in training based on these methods for the first time they are usually puzzled at the beginning, but soon start to realise how effective it is. I remember when I was one of the main characters in a role-play, I understood it was a role-play but was surprised by the fact that I did experience a whole variety of feelings. I was playing a single mother and my children were going to be taken and placed in an institution so I was very much afraid and anxious for my children. I tried to do everything to prevent them being separated from me. I would hardly believe how effective the exercise was till I tried it myself. It was a very positive way to explore feelings and analyse acts.

As a trainer I have organised many training sessions and haven't had any experiences when participants were not happy with the training, or were bored. I can't say it is all fun, as sometimes there are very difficult issues that we have to discuss. I would say it's a mixture of different feelings and experiences. But probably the most important thing is that in spite of the difficulty of the problems explored, it always brings you a lot of satisfaction, no matter whether you're a participant or a trainer. I have found that when using social action methods people are very open and can easily discuss their problems."

The Centre's role in the dissemination phase is through the training of trainers who will share the knowledge and experience gained through the project. Ian Boulton went out to Ekaterinburg in February to follow up on a "Training the Trainers" course he and Jennie Fleming conducted last September and will carry out a participative evaluation with key people involved in the project.

Working alongside community members, practitioners,  
managers and policy-makers to achieve social change.

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