

## Russian Children at Risk

By Mark R. Elliott

*Mark R. Elliott is professor of history, Southern Wesleyan University, Central, South Carolina, and founding editor (1993-present) of the East-West Church & Ministry Report (www.eastwestreport.org). Author of Pawns of Yalta; Soviet Refugees and America's Role in Their Repatriation, he has M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in modern European and Russian history from the University of Kentucky. He has led six short-term mission teams working with Russian orphans. The author wishes to thank the following readers for their helpful comments: Anita Deyneka, Lanny Endicott, Karmen Friesen, Mary Louise Hendley, Cristi Hillis, Iian McDonald, and Jeff Thompson. Earlier drafts of this paper were presented at the annual meeting of Christians Associated for Relationships with Eastern Europe, New York, New York, 1February 2008, and at a conference on "Christianity and Social Problems of Society," St. Petersburg Christian University, St. Petersburg, Russia, 27 May 2008.*

### Natasha

Natasha, I will call her, was 13 in 1999 when her mother was murdered. Her father, who had never been a part of her life, refused to raise Natasha or Alex, her six-year-old step-brother. I met Natasha in February 2000 in an orphanage in the Vladimir Region. Natasha's eyes were crossed and she had the beginnings of a weight problem. Worst of all, she told me, her brother was in a different orphanage. Still, he was to be moved from his pre-school orphanage to hers when he turned seven in July. Also, my home church was willing to pay for eye surgery for Natasha if a Moscow eye exam determined her condition could be corrected. This brightened her spirits.

That summer, in July 2000, I led a mission team to Vladimir to host a summer camp for Russian orphans. Just one day before the end of camp I learned that Natasha was attending another camp less than an hour away. On very short notice a Russian friend drove me to meet Natasha. We arrived after lunch while the children were taking naps. A camp worker entered a large dorm room full of beds to tell Natasha an American was there to see her. She came running to me yelling my name, giving me a big hug – and I had wondered if she would remember me. She told me she had expected my visit that summer, which filled me with some wonder because this reunion, in fact, had barely been arranged.

My Russian companion, Natasha, and I received permission to walk around the

camp to catch up on news. I asked Natasha about her eye exam in Moscow. She said it did not hurt and she was not scared. I asked her about the prospect of eye surgery. She immediately said she wanted it and she was not afraid. She said she would gladly do anything to no longer have crossed eyes. Making our way through a beautiful stand of pines, Natasha next shared ugly news. Instead of her brother coming to live with her in her orphanage, she was told in May that back in February, the month when we had first met, her brother had been adopted by an American couple without her knowledge. And the authorities would not tell her where he now lived in the United States. I am told placing a child for adoption without the knowledge or consent of an older sibling is a violation of Russian law. Natasha shared with us that her father did not want her; she had lost her mother; she had lost her home; and now she had lost her brother, the only person in the world whom she loved. She said that just the previous night she had had a dream about Alex. I promised Natasha I would try to find her brother so they could at least write.

Natasha's surgery was scheduled for May 2001 and Western church funds were paid to the hospital, only to learn in Moscow that her operation was being postponed one year in favor of corrective glasses. After traveling from the Vladimir region, how disheartening this must have been for this painfully self-conscious teen. That same month I had a chance to visit Natasha and her orphanage director. The conversation was tense because Natasha and the director were often at odds. I was told I would not be able to speak with Natasha privately, but when the director was momentarily called out of our meeting on business, Natasha quickly showed me pictures of Alex that she had received from the U.S. Her brother's adoptive parents had also sent her a birthday present and a letter that said they really loved Alex but that he missed his sister a lot. I again promised to try to find Alex's address, but was never able to do so.

Natasha hoped to become a nurse, but her grades were not high enough for that course of study. In September 2001 she entered cooking school in Vladimir. In October Natasha received another letter from Alex in which she learned he might be living in Ohio. He also shared his new parents' names, but that still was not enough for me to track them down.

In 2002 Natasha again traveled to Moscow for surgery. But, sadly, it was again postponed. I can only imagine Natasha's deep disappointment. As of April 2002 I was

trying to arrange an independent medical opinion at the American Clinic in Moscow. Then I received the saddest news. Natasha had dropped out of cooking school, had moved out of her dorm, and had left no forwarding address. None of my contacts in Russia have been able to locate her since. Already having been sold to men by her own mother as a pre-teen, my haunting fear ever since has been that she may have been reduced again to this extreme, the fate of a high percentage of female orphan graduates. Lord have mercy.

### **Nastya**

Nastya, I will call her, was eight in 2000 when my wife and I became her sponsors. When I first met her in an orphanage in the Kostroma Region in February 2001, she was so painfully shy she could hardly look my way. The same was true on my second trip to her orphanage in October 2001. But through letters we learned that she loved math and animals and in person I discovered that at the orphanage she had a kind and protective older brother, Artyom.

In June 2002 I recruited a mission team to host another summer camp near Kostroma where my wife, Darlene, finally was able to meet Nastya. Now almost ten, she opened up quite a bit, sharing with us that kids at school sometimes teased her about her thick glasses. In the next two years we exchanged letters and pictures and sent presents as our various church teams returned to Kostroma. Darlene began to pray fervently that Nastya would find a family before she had to leave the orphanage.

In spring 2004, her caring and dedicated orphanage director chose not to place her with one foster family that she felt was just not right for Nastya. That summer, at our next mission trip camp, she was very affectionate, holding hands, sitting on Darlene's lap, giving hugs. For several years Nastya had been showering us with doilies and tea cozies she had made in her orphanage. In turn, that summer we were able to buy her a pair of much more attractive glasses, which were quite a hit.

That fall 2004 we received great news that Nastya and Artyom had been placed in a loving foster home, partially supported by a church in Kostroma. Nastya wrote us after just three weeks that her new dad was a pastor and her new mom was also her Bible teacher on Sundays and Wednesdays. She had eight new brothers and sisters, six of whom were also foster children. Nastya was excited about everything in her new

family, including its many dogs and cats.

In June 2007 Darlene and I had the privilege of being hosted for a meal in Nastya's and Artyom's foster home. We were a bit embarrassed to be treated almost like royalty. We had a delicious, bountiful meal, partly prepared by a proud Nastya and Artom. But best of all, we found ourselves in a loving, godly home headed by a couple with very big hearts. What a joy it was to be able to meet this giving couple who we know will love, protect, and prepare "our" shy little Nastya for life. That night I was reminded of John 14:18 where Jesus promised, "I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you." Thanks be to God.

What do Natasha's and Nastya's stories tell us? Not the easy, glib math that some in life lose and some win. For Russia's children at risk, the Natashas tragically outnumber the Nastyas, perhaps ten or twenty to one. What their stories do tell us, in their raw pathos and poignancy, is that orphans are flesh and blood, not merely digits in numbing, even paralyzing, statistics. Still, the numbers and the history, the orphanages and the alternatives, the failed solutions and the best practices, the economics and the politics of homeless children – we need to comprehend them all if we are to have any chance to mourn fewer Natashas and celebrate more Nastyas.

### **The Number of Orphans and Street Children**

Approximately 700,000 children reside in Russian orphanages, the largest number for one country worldwide.<sup>1</sup> In addition, estimates for the number of Russian street children vary dramatically from 500,000 to five million.<sup>2</sup> Russia, then, by

---

<sup>1</sup> Kevin O'Flynn, "An Orphanage Is Fostering Change," *Christian Science Monitor*, 10 November 2005. Estimates vary: 650,000-Linda Delaine, "Plight of Russia's Orphans," *Russian Life* (15 March 2007); 700,000-Zhanna Danilova interview, 2 June 2008; 700,000-Judith L. Twigg, "What Has Happened to Russian Society?" in *Russia After the Fall*, ed. by Andrew C. Kuchins (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000), 151; 716,000-EveryChild, quoted in O'Flynn, "Orphanage"; 730,000 – "Russian Orphans," *Moscow Times*, 19 May 2008; 750,000-Andrew Boyd, *Baroness Cox: A Voice for the Voiceless* (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1998), 99.

<sup>2</sup> Estimates of 500,000 to 2.8 million: Kelsey Hoppe, "Bezprizorniki: Street Children in the Former Soviet Union," Children of Crisis Project, 2003, [www.radstock.org](http://www.radstock.org); one to four million-Tatiana Balachova et al., "Street Children and Orphans in Eastern Europe," [www.ouhsc.edu/search/](http://www.ouhsc.edu/search/); and Twigg, "What Has Happened?," 151; two to four million: Hoppe, "Bezprizorniki," 33; two to five million: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 2005, <http://www.gvnet.com/streetchildren/Russia.htm>. For a discussion questioning the higher figures see Svetlana Stephenson, "The Abandoned Children of Russia-From Privileged Class to 'Underclass'" in *Education and Civic Culture in Post-Communist Countries*, ed. by Stephen Webber and Ilkka Liikanen

conservative estimates, is faced with some 2.5 million children at risk out of 39 million youth under 19 (5.8 percent).<sup>3</sup> Only African nations dealing with HIV/AIDS have higher percentages of children at risk.<sup>4</sup>

For Russia the problem of abandoned children is not a new one. Prior to World War I Russia cared for homeless children in Imperial Foundling Homes, with high mortality rates, and in some regions through a system of “boarded out inmates,” a commercial foster care arrangement between orphanages and peasant families, also with high mortality rates.<sup>5</sup> Heavy Russian losses in World War I (3.8 million deaths) led to soaring numbers of homeless children: two million by 1917 and an estimated seven million by 1922-23 in the wake of two revolutions and a civil war.<sup>6</sup> Because of forced collectivization of agriculture and widespread famine, Russia still counted between four and seven million orphaned children by 1932.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, orphanages were able to shelter only a fraction of the total:

1917 – 30,000

1918 – 75,000

1919 – 125,000

1920 – 400,000

1921 – 540,000<sup>8</sup>

In the 1930s ongoing collectivization and Stalin’s purges and deportations

---

(London: Palgrave, 2002), 189. A portion of the variance in estimates may be explained by seasonal conditions, with harsh winters driving many children to return temporarily to orphanages or abusive homes: Hoppe, “Bezprizorniki,” 33.

<sup>3</sup> DeLaine, “Plight,” 2; Susan Hillis interview, 16 January 2008; Karmen Friesen interview, 4 January 2008.

<sup>4</sup> UNAIDS, UNICEF, and USAID, *Children on the Brink: A Joint Report on Orphan Estimates and Program Strategies* (Washington, DC: The Synergy Project, 2002), 22; Cristi Hillis, “What Do They Need to Survive? Addressing the Needs of Adolescent Russian Orphans,” senior thesis, Davidson College, 2006, note 8.

<sup>5</sup> Catriona Kelly, *Children’s World; Growing Up in Russia, 1890-1991* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 177.

<sup>6</sup> Judith Harwin, *Children of the Russian State, 1917-95* (Aldershot, England: Avebury, 1996), 11; Hillis, “What Do They Need?” 32; Thomas P. Whitney, “Postscript” in Vyacheslav Shishkov, *Children of the Street* (Royal Oak, MI: Strathcona Publishing Co., 1931), 145; Alan Ball, “State Children: Soviet Russia’s *Besprizornnye* and the New Socialist Generation,” *Russian Review* 52 (April 1993), 229.

<sup>7</sup> Hillis, “What Do They Need?,” 35; Svetlana Gladyshev, *Deti bol’shoi bedy* (Moscow: Zvonista, 2004), 28.

<sup>8</sup> Kelly, *Children’s World*, 193; Harwin, *Children*, 10; Hillis, “What Do They Need?,” 306; Ball, “State Children,” 233-34.

further swelled the ranks of orphans to an estimated seven to nine million.<sup>9</sup> Making matters much worse, the 27 million Soviet fatalities in World War II left additional legions of homeless children. Between 1943 and 1945, the NKVD (secret police) took custody of 842,144 homeless children.<sup>10</sup>

From 1941 to 1947 the number of orphanages in the Russian Republic alone increased from 1,661 to 3,900, with the number of children cared for more than doubling from 187,780 to 422,600. Similarly, homes for newborns that numbered 397 in 1940 increased to 688 by 1948, housing nearly 50,000 infants in the latter year.<sup>11</sup>

The postwar decades saw a gradual reduction in institutionalized orphans such that by 1987 the state was caring for 284,000 children in 422 infant homes, 745 children's homes, and 237 boarding schools for orphans, with additional orphans placed in regular boarding schools.<sup>12</sup> More recently, in the 1990s, Russia endured the failure of numerous industrial enterprises, rising unemployment, bouts of soaring inflation, and a collapsing social safety net – all fueling the ranks of children at risk.

To cope with additional hundreds of thousands of homeless children, the number of Russian orphanages more than doubled from 560 in 1995 to 1,420 in 1999 (approximately 1,000 regular orphanages, 170 institutions for disabled children, and 250 infant homes).<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, the economic crises of the 1990s meant inadequate federal and regional funding for the additional facilities.<sup>14</sup> By 2007, the Russian government was responsible for approximately 700,000 orphans in 1,600 institutions of various types, not to mention even larger numbers of street children.<sup>15</sup>

## Trends

The purpose of this paper is to review economic, political, and ministry trends affecting Russian children at risk, particularly as they relate to the efforts of Christian ministries, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and government bodies to

---

<sup>9</sup> Hoppe, "Bezprizorniki," 6. In 1926 the government ceased publication of orphan statistics. Harwin, *Children*, 10; Hillis, "What Do They Need?," 36.

<sup>10</sup> Kelly, *Children's World*, 242-43.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Waters, "'Cuckoo Mothers' and 'Apparatchiks': Glasnost and Children's Homes" in *Perestroika and Soviet Women*, ed. by Mary Buckley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 124.

<sup>13</sup> Stephenson, "Abandoned," 190. See also Hoppe, "Bezprizorniki," 13.

<sup>14</sup> Twigg, "What Has Happened?," 148.

<sup>15</sup> DeLaine, "Plight," 2.

address this daunting social need. In the 17-year span from the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991-92 to the present, various trends may be noted in conditions faced by Russian orphans and in efforts to ameliorate their plight. First, networking and collaborative efforts on behalf of Russian children at risk have increased substantially. Especially noteworthy has been the role of Mission Specialties (Atlanta, GA), Peter Deyneka Russian Ministries (Wheaton, IL), and Viva Network (England) in launching systematic networking and coalition building, illustrated by a series of conferences between 1999 and 2007 that were organized in Russia and the United States to address the needs of Russian children at risk. The Association for Spiritual Renewal (the Russian affiliate of Peter Deyneka Russian Ministries) and Viva Network sponsored a "Consultation on Christian Outreach to Russian Orphans and Street Children" in Moscow, 9-10 July 1999. The next year Mission Specialties, Russian Ministries, and the Global Center at Samford University (Birmingham, Alabama) organized a "National Summit for Children at Risk" in Atlanta, Georgia, 9-11 November 2000. The 230 persons in attendance represented 120 organizations and ministries. This gathering served as the catalyst for the establishment of a Western networking body called the CoMission for Children at Risk (CCR). Atlanta-based psychologist Ron Braund provided the support base, while home missionaries Karmen and Kristen Friesen subsequently developed CCR's impressive database of 427 churches, NGOs, and agencies with concerns for Russian children at risk (<http://comission.org/organizations/>). Organization profiles may be accessed alphabetically, by ministry focus, or by geographic focus. Especially valuable is the ability to identify groups concerned with 18 different issues and types of outreach to children at risk, including adoption (59), camp programs (124), HIV/AIDS (26), orphanage sponsorship (119), post-orphanage transition (90), and street children (100). The CCR website also categorizes agencies by countries of concern, for example, Russia (218), Ukraine (129), and Romania (48).<sup>16</sup>

After a number of false starts, RiskNetwork, a Russian-based CCR counterpart, came into being in 2004. Its Russian-language database of 150 groups ([www.risknetwork.ru](http://www.risknetwork.ru)), likewise is a helpful means of identifying personnel,

---

<sup>16</sup> <http://comission.org/organizations/>; Karmen Friesen interview, 4 January 2008; Hoppe, "Bezprizorniki," 23.

information, and resources for the benefit of children at risk. For example, the RiskNet database includes a list of 23 relevant websites and a directory of groups working with special needs children.<sup>17</sup> Also in 2004 Mission Specialties and Peter Deyneka Russian Ministries sponsored a follow-up, by–invitation conference on ministry to Russian children at risk in Rome, Georgia, with concerned Russians as well as North Americans in attendance. Finally, two additional orphan assistance conferences were held in Moscow and Vladimir (2006) and in St. Petersburg (2007).

Collaborative efforts on behalf of Russian children at risk, while too numerous to enumerate, may be categorized as follows: 1) partnerships between Western church and parachurch agencies (example: Buckner International and Children’s HopeChest); 2) partnerships between Western and Russian church and parachurch agencies (example: Russian Ministries and Evangelical Christian-Baptist churches); and 3) partnerships between church and parachurch groups and government agencies and NGOs (example: USAID, Assistance to Russian Orphans, and Children’s HopeChest). In the mid-1990s, Buckner International (Dallas, Texas) and Children’s HopeChest (CHC) worked together to collect “Shoes for Russian Souls,” which provided tens of thousands of pairs of footwear for Russian orphans. This collaborative effort received major promotional assistance from Dallas radio station KCBI and the ABC TV affiliate in Dallas. In addition, Buckner International, with 75 years of experience in group homes and family-style care for orphans, mentored CHC in establishing the same in Russia by training CHC’s Russian staff.<sup>18</sup>

A second trend with a significant impact on Russian children at risk has been a strengthening Russian economy. In recent years rising oil and gas revenues have provided more reliable government funding for orphanages. In addition, some Russian businesses have increased their charitable donations for children at risk. Sherpets Orphanage near Ryazan, for example, has a 25-seat bus and a 12-passenger van donated by Tiumen Oil Company and a Moscow businessman.<sup>19</sup> Also partly due to the improved economy, Western agencies now place less emphasis upon direct

---

<sup>17</sup> Anita Deyneka interview, 14 January 2008. While some organizations hesitate to sign on for such public exposure, many others overcome their initial uncertainties: at present an average of two to three new groups join Risknet weekly. Zhanna Danilova interview, 2 June 2008.

<sup>18</sup> George Steiner interview, 3 January 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Author’s visit to Sherpets Orphanage, Ryazan, 10-16 June 2007; Kelly, *Children’s World*, 596.

humanitarian aid in favor of greater efforts to better prepare orphans psychologically and spiritually for the trauma of graduation, often as early as ages 15 or 16. This shift is the result of 1) the decreased overall need for material assistance; 2) the increasing difficulty of clearing Russian customs with humanitarian aid, and 3) a changing Western understanding of how best to help (now focusing on more training for national staff). One caveat is that while overall conditions in Russian orphanages have improved considerably in the past 17 years, geographic disparities in orphanage funding are still pronounced: typically better in European Russian than east of the Urals, and better in urban than rural areas.<sup>20</sup> Some orphanages in Moscow and St. Petersburg receive so many offers of assistance that they place qualifications on gifts they will accept, while provincial orphanages may be no better off than 17 years ago.<sup>21</sup>

A third trend, previously alluded to, has been an increase in Western efforts to assist older orphans and orphan graduates. In the 1990s, it did not take long for Western NGOs and Christian ministries to recognize that as difficult as conditions were for Russian orphans, circumstances faced by orphan graduates were infinitely worse. A Russian Interior Ministry report estimated that of the 15,000 children leaving orphanages annually, 40 percent were soon unemployed and homeless, 30 percent committed crimes, and 10 percent committed suicide.<sup>22</sup> Also, a recent study estimated that 40 percent of orphan graduates become addicted to alcohol or drugs,<sup>23</sup> while estimates for prostitution among female orphan graduates run as high as 60 percent.<sup>24</sup> Interviews in 2006 with directors of Russian tech schools for orphan graduates indicated an average unemployment rate of 90 percent for their graduates. In addition, those finding jobs frequently were unable to keep them for extended periods, adding

---

<sup>20</sup> Cristi Hillis interview, 16 January 2008; Jeff Thompson interview, 18 January 2008; George Steiner interview, 3 January 2008; Katya Celinina, quoted in George Steiner interview, 3 January 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Zhanna Danilova interview, 2 June 2008.

<sup>22</sup> DeLaine, "Plight," 2. See also Kathleen Hunt, *Abandoned to the State: Cruelty and Neglect in Russian Orphanages* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1998, [www.org/reports98/russian/](http://www.org/reports98/russian/)).

<sup>23</sup> Mike Hollow, "A Contextual Analysis of Poverty in the Russian Federation," (Tearfund HIAF, 2007), 46.

<sup>24</sup> Tom Davis, *Red Letters: Living a Faith that Bleeds* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2007), 112. See also Mark R. Elliott, "Faith-Based Responses to Trafficking in Women from Eastern Europe," *Bogoslovskie razmyshleniya/Theological Reflections* No. 5 (2005), 147-91; Mark R. Elliott, "Christian Responses to Trafficking in Women from Eastern Europe," *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 13 (Spring 2005), 1-4; and 13 (Summer 2005), 5-6.

to their precarious existence.<sup>25</sup>

Examples of Christian ministry and NGO efforts to address the needs of older orphans and orphan graduates include the following:

1) In 1998 Children's HopeChest (George Steiner and Tom Davis) established its first group home, known as a "family center," in 1998 in the Vladimir Region and has since added supervised transitional living programs in Vladimir and Kostroma Regions and ministry centers for orphan graduates in the cities of Vladimir, Kostroma, and Ryazan. The latter offer graduates a safe haven including emergency shelter, life-skill classes, Bible studies, counseling, recreation, and fellowship. CHC reports that 1,000 older orphans and orphan graduates participate in its various transitional living programs, with very low rates of substance abuse, unemployment, or criminal offenses.<sup>26</sup>

2) Spoken For International Youth Outreach (Scott Werntz) sponsors church-based mentoring of older orphans; Broken Dancers, a break-dance team of older orphans from Penza; and a "Fireworks" program, helping older orphans and orphan graduates cope with their physical, medical, social, spiritual, and emotional needs.<sup>27</sup>

3) Christian Broadcasting Network (Steve Weber), based in Kyiv, Ukraine, has developed a Russian-language life skills curriculum to assist orphan graduates in independent living. It will soon be available in Ukrainian as well. CBN also sponsors training workshops for those working with older orphans and orphan graduates. To date, the workshops, usually twice a year, have been attended by some 400 Ukrainians, 20 Kyrgyz, and four each from Russia, Belarus, and Romania.<sup>28</sup>

4) Miramed (Juliette Engel), a Moscow-based NGO with a U.S. headquarters in Seattle, Washington, published two excellent survivor guides for orphan graduates, one edition for Moscow and one for St. Petersburg. Miramed has also produced a puppet show and a documentary warning orphan graduates that promises of jobs in the West very often prove to be bait set by sexual traffickers.<sup>29</sup>

5) Russian Orphan Opportunity Fund (Georgia Williams), launched in Moscow in 1997-

---

<sup>25</sup> Hillis, "What Do They Need?," 65.

<sup>26</sup> CHC website: <http://www.hopechest.org>; Korvan Funk interview, 18 June 2008.

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.spokenfor.org/dance>; Karmen Friesen interview, 4 January 2008.

<sup>28</sup> E-mail from Karen Springs, CBN, to author, 8 May and 12 May 2008; Karmen Friesen interview, 4 January 2008.

<sup>29</sup> Miramed, "Progress Report – 2006," <http://miramed.org/social.htm>; video of puppet show in author's possession.

98, offers life-skill classes, educational curricula, training, and counseling for older orphans and orphan graduates. ROOF was founded by Arthur Stracinski, a retired New York City public school teacher whose mother was a Ukrainian orphan.<sup>30</sup>

6) SOS Kinderdorf International has established seven youth centers in Russia where orphan graduates can live up to four years.<sup>31</sup>

A fourth major trend in efforts to assist Russian children at risk may be categorized as “deinstitutionalization.” Examples of this trend include adoption, family-style group homes, independent living homes for older orphans, and increasing support for foster care and guardianship programs. In the 1990s leading Russian child-care specialists were reading the growing literature on the damage inflicted on children through institutional upbringing. This, in turn, prompted a variety of experiments in alternative forms of care.<sup>32</sup> The rationale for this shift is summed up well by economic development specialist Eric Thurman:

Best practices established by leading groups that work with children in crisis show that the greatest needs of children are emotional. They need to be bonded long term with a caring family rather than assigned a place in an institution. Programs that enable local families to take in orphans are much better [and] cheaper solutions than building and maintaining orphanages.<sup>33</sup>

One alternative to institutions is, of course, adoption. In 1991 this author accompanied David Kim, president, and John Williams, vice-president, of Holt International Children’s Services to Moscow to meet government officials, orphanage directors, and Russian Christians just beginning to overcome barriers to charitable work with orphans. Out of those initial contacts, Holt was able to arrange the adoption of 57 special-needs orphans in the U.S. and Europe.<sup>34</sup>

Between 1991 and 2007, Americans adopted 54,730 Russian orphans. From 12

---

<sup>30</sup> Georgia Williams interview, 13 March 2001; [www.roofnet.org](http://www.roofnet.org).

<sup>31</sup> “Youth Facilities,” SOS – Kinderdorf International website: [http://www.sos-dd.ru/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=22&Itemid=35](http://www.sos-dd.ru/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=22&Itemid=35).

<sup>32</sup> Kelly, *Children’s World*, 594.

<sup>33</sup> Philip Smith and Eric Thurman, *A Billion Bootstraps: Microcredit, Barefoot Banking, and the Business Solution for Ending Poverty* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007), 22. For a dissenting opinion that questions the received wisdom that families and foster care are necessarily superior to the nurturing of better orphanages, see D. Macarov, “Children’s Villages as a Possible Solution for the World’s Orphans,” SOS Kinderdorf website – [www.sos-dd.ru](http://www.sos-dd.ru), 2005.

<sup>34</sup> Mark R. Elliott, “Homeless Children and Adoption in the Soviet Union,” unpublished paper, 22 February 1991, 6-10.

children adopted in 1991, the number peaked in 2004 at 5,865. In 2007, American families adopted 2,207 orphans from Russia.

U.S. Adoptions of Russian Orphans<sup>35</sup>

1991	12
1992	324
1993	746
1994	1,530
1995	1,896
1996	2,454
1997	3,816
1998	4,491
1999	4,348
2000	4,269
2001	4,279
2002	4,939
2003	5,209
2004	5,865
2005	4,639
2006	3,706
2007	2,207
<b>Total</b>	<b>54,730</b>

In 1998, in the wake of cases of adoption profiteering, Russia passed legislation to more closely monitor international adoptions and to encourage domestic adoptions. Since then, periodic moratoria on international adoptions and stringent reaccreditation requirements for adoption agencies have significantly reduced placements of orphans abroad.<sup>36</sup> The sharp decline in international adoptions from Russia is indeed related to the moratoria precipitated by charges of selling babies. In addition, fewer children find permanent homes abroad because of the skyrocketing costs of international adoption, as much as \$25,000 to \$40,000 per child.<sup>37</sup> These exorbitant charges are largely a function of bribes extracted all along Russia's bureaucratic pipeline.

Finally, the murder of 15 Russian adoptees by their American parents

---

<sup>35</sup> U.S. Department of State and Holt International Children's Services: <http://www.holtintl.org/instats.shtm1> (holt-1992-2002 stats). In 1999, in addition to 4,300 Russian orphans adopted by Americans, 1,900 additional Russian orphans were adopted by families from other nations. Delaine, "Plight," 1.

<sup>36</sup> DeLaine, "Plight," 1-2.

<sup>37</sup> Karmen Friesen interview, 4 January 2008.

undoubtedly has stiffened the resolve of Russian opponents of international adoption.<sup>38</sup> As justifiable as concern should be over these tragic deaths, it must be noted as well that the state-dominated Russian press highlights American homicides but devotes comparatively little attention to Russian children dying at the hands of Russian parents. Russia does not tally figures for deaths or domestic abuse cases of children adopted in Russia. But we do know that each year 2,500 Russian children are murdered by their parents and that, to date, approximately one million Russian adoptive parents have been convicted of child abuse and have themselves been denied parental rights.<sup>39</sup>

Fortunately, while international adoptions are declining, domestic adoptions are on the rise. The shift towards less international and more domestic adoptions may be illustrated by the case of attorney Alexander Rodin. In the early 1990s this former St. Petersburg Duma representative enlisted the help of Baroness Caroline Cox, then head of the British branch of Christian Solidarity International, to document and publicize the widespread misdiagnosis of untold numbers of orphans as oligophrenic (mentally deficient).<sup>40</sup> Subsequently, Rodin worked for many years facilitating international adoptions. Presently, his new agency, Light of Love, "exists to help Russian Christian families adopt and foster orphans," working "in close collaboration with churches around St. Petersburg to identify families, and then help them through the adoption process."<sup>41</sup> Rodin takes a holistic approach as he promotes domestic adoptions, screens and counsels adopting families, processes adoption paperwork, and provides post-adoption support.<sup>42</sup>

Similarly, Galina Obrovets, an energetic advocate for Christian women's social concerns and editor of Moscow-based *Sestra* magazine, has organized a program to promote church support for domestic adoptions. In 2008 this effort led to the publication of a promotional booklet and the production of a 23-minute adoption

---

<sup>38</sup> Georgy Bovt, "The Politics of Adoption," *Moscow Times*, 27 March 2008; Cristi Hillis interview, 6 January 2008.

<sup>39</sup> Bovt, "Politics."

<sup>40</sup> Boyd, *Baroness Cox*, 94-104; Baroness Caroline Cox, *Trajectories of Despair: Misdiagnosis and Maltreatment of Soviet Orphans* (Zurich: Christian Solidarity International, 1991). See also Kelly, *Children's World*, 596.

<sup>41</sup> Cristi Hillis website: <http://cristihillis.com/go/adoption>. For a moving account of the adoption of eight Russian orphans by Brian and Susan Hillis, assisted by Alexander Rodin, see Kay Warren, *Dangerous Surrender; What Happens When You Say Yes to God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 91-93.

<sup>42</sup> Karmen Friesen interview, 4 January 2008.

documentary, “Boiya semya [God’s Family],” for use in churches.<sup>43</sup> (CBN in Kyiv has already produced a video in Ukrainian, “Papochka [Daddy],” to encourage Ukrainian believers to consider adoption.)<sup>44</sup> In the Leningrad Region one Pentecostal pastor has encouraged his congregation to adopt Russian orphans, with 20 church families having done so to date. In another Leningrad Region Pentecostal church, an elder and his wife have adopted 20 orphans.<sup>45</sup> Mikhail Pimenov, a retired military officer and member of the Central Baptist Church in Moscow, has established a School for Adoptive Parents which is providing training for 200 couples per year who are preparing to adopt.<sup>46</sup>

The Russian government’s preference for deinstitutionalization is also becoming more apparent. President Vladimir Putin’s 2006 state-of-the-union address highlighted Russian’s demographic crisis and proposed better child care as one of the requirements for reversing population decline. He specifically advocated a shift from orphanages to smaller group homes, foster care, and domestic adoptions.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, he warned of the resistance that was bound to come from those with vested interests in maintaining Russia’s costly system of orphanages and infant homes (\$1.5 billion per year).<sup>48</sup> On 13 November 2006 the Russian minister of education, who himself has adopted a Russian orphan, cosponsored a meeting for regional ministry officials to promote domestic adoptions. This gathering in Moscow was held with assistance and funding from Assistance for Russian Orphans (ARO) and USAID.<sup>49</sup> Then in 2007 President Putin gave public support for “Take Me Home,” a campaign directly aimed at transferring children from orphanages to alternative, less institutional forms of care.

As elaborated in 2007 legislation, the plan calls for domestic adoptions, foster care, and close-relative guardianship to replace 70 percent of existing orphanages in three years’ time. While well-intentioned, the time frame may be overly ambitious, even precipitous, in light of the need for proper preparation of foster families, adoptive

---

<sup>43</sup> Anita Deyneka interview, 4 April 2008; Galina Obrovets interview, 4 June 2008.

<sup>44</sup> E-mail from Karen Springs to author, 12 May 2008.

<sup>45</sup> Karmen Friesen interview, 4 January 2008.

<sup>46</sup> Galina Obrovets interview, 4 June 2008; [www.innewfamily.ru](http://www.innewfamily.ru).

<sup>47</sup> Bagila Bukharbayeva, “A Dark Secret Amid the Boom,” *Moscow Times*, 30 August 2007, p.4; George Steiner interview, 3 January 2008.

<sup>48</sup> Bukharbayeva, “Dark Secret,” 4. See also Hoppe, “Bezprizorniki,” 11; Kelly, *Children’s World*, 269.

<sup>49</sup> Susan Hillis interview, 16 January 2008.

families, and social workers.<sup>50</sup> Rapid deinstitutionalization was attempted in Romania, but did not work.<sup>51</sup> It is reported that one Russian region did empty all its orphanages in 2007, but in the wake of various miscues, 40 percent of the children had to be returned to institutional care.<sup>52</sup>

Support for foster care families, as well, is becoming a government priority. Typically, state officials, NGOs, and Christian ministries all speak as if domestic adoptions and foster care are new phenomenon in Russia. But in the nineteenth century, as noted, a system existed for commercial foster care of “boarded out inmates” from orphanages.<sup>53</sup> And in the 1920s, in the Soviet era, an estimated 100,000 homeless children were placed in foster care.<sup>54</sup> Despite these emergency measures, utopian Communist ideology still anticipated that not only orphans but all children would one day be brought up in institutional settings free of the “corrupting” influence of parents who might harbor individualistic, bourgeois notions of child rearing. In such a climate it is no surprise that orphanages and boarding schools were idealized as incubators of the “new Soviet man,” while, by contrast, adoption and foster care received short shift.<sup>55</sup>

Nevertheless, wartime exigencies led in 1943 to state commendation for adoption and foster care, with these alternatives to institutionalization continuing to receive state sanction after the war and even after the Stalin era. Though not publicized, the 1960s witnessed an increase in adoptions. In addition, favorable articles on foster care became more common in the 1970s while adoption began to receive sympathetic treatment in the Soviet press in the 1980s.<sup>56</sup> Still, the vast medical and social service establishment, as well as widespread popular sentiment, assumed that the best place for abandoned children, typically thought of as “damaged” goods, was in orphanages, preferably in out-of-sight locations.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> Karmen Friesen interview, 4 January 2008; Cristi Hillis website: <http://cristihillis.com/90/adoption>.

<sup>51</sup> Karmen Friesen interview, 4 January 2008.

<sup>52</sup> Susan Hillis interview, 16 January 2008. “The government in Ukraine has deemed 2008 the year of adoption, and has a goal of eliminating all orphanages, starting in Kyiv.” E-mail from Karen Springs, CBN, 8 May 2008.

<sup>53</sup> Kelly, *Children’s World*, 177.

<sup>54</sup> Ball, “State Children,” 238.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 228-29; Boyd, *Baroness Cox*, 110.

<sup>56</sup> Kelly, *Children’s World*, 243 and 269.

<sup>57</sup> Harwin, *Children*.

Still, under Gorbachev and Yeltsin (1985-99) the state authorized and began to promote alternatives to large orphanages through “smaller, family-type homes” and foster care.<sup>58</sup> In 1990, Baroness Caroline Cox appears to have been the first Western sponsor of a Russian foster-family home. In a pair of connected high-rise apartments, foster parents Serge and Irina Buchtoyarova assumed responsibility for 11 homeless children who otherwise would have been placed in orphanages.<sup>59</sup> By 2000 Baroness Caroline Cox had managed to renovate a five-story building in Moscow for her “Our Family” Center. By 2001 this program had custody of 115 children, 90 of whom were in foster homes. “Our Family” also had trained 300 social workers and had secured UNICEF funding for training officials in child protection agencies.<sup>60</sup>

Another innovative experiment, this one in Kitezh, Kaluga Region, was described by one journalist as “a therapeutic community of foster families.” This successful program, launched in 1992 by former radio journalist Dmitriy Morozov, was followed in 2005-2006 by the establishment of Kitezh-Orion, a sister community organized along the same lines, located 60 kilometers from Moscow.<sup>61</sup> Likewise, Father Andrei, an Orthodox priest in the Kostroma Region, has established a private orphanage at Kovalyovo organized on the basis of semi-independent family groups within the institution. As observed by this author, children are grouped in families led by long-term house parents. Here, orphans of various ages live, shop, and cook together, sharing house and farm chores as would any family. Other salient features of the program include regular worship in an Orthodox chapel on campus and periodic mountain climbing expeditions in the Caucasus led by Father Andrei, a former professional mountain climber.<sup>62</sup>

SOS Kinderdorf, of Austrian origin, has taken the same approach of “family type children’s homes” for its orphan villages in Russia.<sup>63</sup> Its first four facilities, opened in 1996, are located in Tomlino (Moscow Region), Pushkin (a St. Petersburg suburb),

---

<sup>58</sup> Stephenson, “Abandoned,” 188-89.

<sup>59</sup> Boyd, *Baroness Cox*, 110. See also Kelly, *Children’s World*, 594.

<sup>60</sup> Maria Ternovskaya interview, 14 May 2001; Christina M. Lyon and Chris Jones, *A Trajectory of Hope: An Evaluation Report on the Moscow “Our Family” Project in the Russian Federation* (Moscow: UNICEF, 2000).

<sup>61</sup> O’Flynn, “Orphanage.”

<sup>62</sup> Author’s visit to Kovalyovo Orphanage, June 2004.

<sup>63</sup> Kelly, *Children’s World*, 270.

Lavrogo (Orlovsky Region), and Kandalaksha (Murmansk Region). In 2006 SOS Kinderdorf also initiated a Foster Families Project in Murmansk and a Family Strengthening Program in St. Petersburg.<sup>64</sup>

EveryChild is an international NGO headquartered in Britain with similar aims in mind. It has been training family social workers in Russia since the early 1990s. Like SOS Kinderdorf, it favors strategies to preserve at-risk families. But in unavoidable cases it urges careful screening of would-be foster parents for at-risk children.<sup>65</sup>

The same philosophy informs the approach of Children's HopeChest (CHC), Colorado Springs, Colorado, a ministry that launched a pilot foster care program in 1998 at Lakinsk, Vladimir Region, and separate family-style homes for boys and girls on the property of Lakinsk Orphanage. CHC greatly benefited from Buckner International, with its 75 years of experience in foster care. Buckner even funded training for some CHC Russian staff in Texas. Buckner began its own foster care efforts in the Vladimir Region of Russia in 1995 and now sponsors a range of programs for orphans and orphan graduates in St. Petersburg. As Children's HopeChest opened additional family-style group homes in the Vladimir and Kostroma Regions, it developed a reputation for innovative alternatives to institutionalization of children at risk. This good name, in turn, led to numerous opportunities to train social workers and ministry personnel in the administration of family-style group homes and foster family programs. In 2002 USAID selected CHC, along with Holt International Children's Services and Charities Aid Foundation, to assist ARO in the awarding of dozens of grants in Russia to NGOs and ministries undertaking group home and foster care initiatives.<sup>66</sup>

Russian regional government programs favoring deinstitutionalization developed in tandem with NGO and Christian ministry alternatives to orphanages. The Samara Region seems to have pioneered the foster care movement in terms of state

---

<sup>64</sup> sos-dd.ru.

<sup>65</sup> O'Flynn, "Orphanage;" Assistance to Russian Orphans (ARO), "Early Intervention: Giving Russian Children a Chance," [http://www.aro.ru/gate/doc-files/early\\_intervent.pdf](http://www.aro.ru/gate/doc-files/early_intervent.pdf).

<sup>66</sup> George Steiner interview, 3 January 2008; S. Ivanov *et al.*, *In-Depth Analysis of the Situation of Working Street Children in Moscow* (Moscow: International Labor Office, 2001), 69; Analiz Gonzalez, "Buckner Takes Foster Care Expertise around the Globe," 2008, <http://www.buckner.org/enews-fostercareglobe.shtml>.

provision. In January 1999 “Samara had 500 of the 876 foster families in Russia.”<sup>67</sup> The Kaliningrad Region followed suit with assistance from UNICEF.<sup>68</sup> By 2001 approximately 20 Russian regions had approved foster care legislation, including Moscow, Perm, and Altai, in addition to Samara and Kaliningrad.<sup>69</sup>

Physicist Maria Ternovskaya partnered with Baroness Caroline Cox in the founding stages of “Our Family” where I interviewed her in May 2001. By that point she had been researching best practices in care for at-risk children for a decade. Ternovskaya soon left “Our Family” for Moscow Orphanage 19 where she inaugurated a pathbreaking, multi-faceted approach to serving homeless children. As she explained, “We tried to follow the British and American models of foster placement, and actually the model we created is even better because we have all kinds of specialists gathered together in one place.”<sup>70</sup> Orphanage 19 is a well-kept facility near Baumanskaya Metro Station in Moscow. But of the 130 children in its charge, less than 20 are in residence, the rest having been placed in foster families. The orphanage itself doubles as a family social service hub with staff handling child placement, counseling, foster parent training, and legal issues. It all is a realization of Ternovskaya’s philosophy: “The first thing is that a child should be in a family and not in an orphanage. When they leave [orphanages], they can’t cope with normal life because they have no models for family life.”<sup>71</sup> To date, Orphanage 19 has placed over 300 children in foster homes. Fortunately, failed placements are low (five to ten percent), while 25 percent of the children eventually are adopted by their foster parents.<sup>72</sup>

Approximately 5,000 children have now been placed in foster homes in 40 of Russia’s 89 regions. Still, many bureaucrats and orphanage directors resist the trend because it threatens the vested interest of thousands of staff employed in orphanages, many of whom would lose their positions if foster care and adoptions came to

---

<sup>67</sup> Stephenson, “Abandoned,” 189; Svetlana Sidorenko-Stephenson, “Prostitution and Young People in Russia” in David Barrett, E. Barrett, and N. Mullenger, eds., *Youth Prostitution in the New Europe; The Growth in Sex Work* (London: Russell House, 2000), 124.

<sup>68</sup> Stephenson, “Abandoned,” 189; Svetlana Stephenson, “Street Children in Moscow; Using and Creating Social Capital,” *The Sociological Review* 49 (No. 4, 2001), 530-47.

<sup>69</sup> Maria Ternovskaya interview, 14 May 2001.

<sup>70</sup> Svetlana Osadchuk, “Little Sasha’s Search for Love and Dinosaurs,” *Moscow Times*, 2 March 2007.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> O’Flynn, “Orphans.”

predominate.<sup>73</sup> At the same time, to be fair, foster care is no panacea, as noted earlier in reference to too-rapid deinstitutionalization and the trauma of unsuccessful adoption or foster family placements. Furthermore, reports do surface of some foster parents viewing of foster children as means to obtain government stipends and “free” labor, underscoring the need for careful screening of prospective foster families.<sup>74</sup>

In April 2008 the Russian Duma passed legislation on orphan guardianship which has received mixed reviews from children-at-risk advocates. Some, such as staff of Baroness Caroline Cox’s “Our Family,” fear the new law may unduly restrict or curtail NGO and Christian ministry foster care and group home programs. Other specialists believe the new legislation does not pose such a threat and may benefit orphans through government stipends for guardianship placements. Nothing yet may be said with certainty regarding the effects of this new legislation. Much will depend upon its interpretation and implementation.<sup>75</sup>

A fifth trend affecting children at risk is a new wave of Russian nationalism and xenophobia. Positively, we can applaud Putin’s assertion that Russia can take care of its own, as that translates into improved support for children at risk, programs to promote domestic adoption, and funding for properly administered foster care and family-style group homes.<sup>76</sup> But re-emerging national pride is regrettable to the extent that it curtails adoption placements abroad and stymies international assistance for Russian children at risk. One longtime veteran of East European ministry believes that the West tends to underestimate the depth of humiliation Russians felt in the wake of the Soviet Union’s collapse. By way of contrast, this Christian leader states that, without reservation, “The driving force in Russia today is the reassertion of national pride.”<sup>77</sup> This not only translates into a decline in international adoption, but it also spells reduced international humanitarian assistance for orphans. One casualty has been the Samaritan’s Purse Christmas Shoebox outreach. In 2005 this ministry distributed 600,000 Christmas gift boxes to Russian orphans.<sup>78</sup> However, in 2006 and 2007 no Christmas shoeboxes cleared Russian customs. Widespread speculation points

---

<sup>73</sup> Stephenson, “Abandoned,” 190; Osadchuk, “Little Sasha’s Search.”

<sup>74</sup> Nikolai Dimitriev interview, 22 June 2008.

<sup>75</sup> Angela Baker interview, 4 June 2008; Zhanna Danilova interview, 2 June 2008.

<sup>76</sup> Jeff Thompson interview, 18 January 2008; Cristi Hillis interview, 16 January 2008.

<sup>77</sup> Anonymous, January 2008.

<sup>78</sup> Karmen Friesen interview, 4 January 2008.

to national pride as a likely explanation.<sup>79</sup> The blow such gifts deal to national self esteem may best explain their abrupt end.

Russian leaders, including Vladimir Putin, increasingly regard Western NGOs as Trojan Horses smuggling suspect democratic notions into Russia, thereby threatening the Kremlin's hold on power.<sup>80</sup> Ukraine's Orange Revolution, bolstered by Western-funded, pro-democracy NGOs and religious organizations, led directly to the Kremlin's decision to further restrict NGOs and Western ministries working in Russia. In 2006 Putin had the Russian Duma pass legislation that is now dramatically reducing the number of functioning NGOs. Putin is especially hostile toward those with major Western funding, which he has labeled "puppeteers from abroad."<sup>81</sup>

Russia has also been upset with Western involvement in Georgia, the proposed missile defense system in Eastern Europe, Ukraine's efforts to obtain NATO membership, U.S. support for an independent Kosovo, and U.S. criticism of Russia's handling of Chechnya. All of the above have led to greater scrutiny of Western NGOs and mission agencies. For example, in summer 2007, a regional police official, well disposed to the good work of Western Christian ministries, confided to an American friend that he was no longer in a position to approve Western camp ministries; team passports had to be vetted through Moscow. Americans slated to minister in that region were re-routed to Ukraine.<sup>82</sup> At the same time, many other Western ministry teams did work with Russian orphans in 2007. Thus, as is often the case in Russia, restrictions may not be consistently enforced.

But cases of harassment of Western ministries and NGOs continue apace. On 9 April 2008, Russian authorities at Moscow's Domodedovo Airport refused to allow Jeff Thompson, president of California-based East European Outreach (EEO), to enter the country. Despite a valid, multi-entry visa, he was placed on the next return flight to Frankfurt without his luggage, within hours of his arrival, and without explanation. This case is especially egregious given Thompson's highly successful mission of mercy in the 1990s to inmates of Russia's youth prisons – ironically, under contract with

---

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*; Jeff Thompson interview, 18 January 2008; Cristi Hillis, 16 January 2008.

<sup>80</sup> "FSB Says Foreign NGOs Help Terrorists," *Moscow Times*, 9 April 2008, p.3.

<sup>81</sup> Mike Eckel, "Rights Groups: Thousands of Russian NGOs Face Closure for Not Meeting Onerous Rules," Associated Press, 16 April 2008.

<sup>82</sup> Jeff Thompson interview, 18 January 2008.

Russia's Ministry of the Interior.<sup>83</sup>

Through his work in youth prisons, Thompson discovered that one quarter of youth offenders were former orphans. Seeing the need to reach this vulnerable population earlier, EEO developed a sponsorship program for foster families in the former Soviet Union. Today EEO supports 14 foster families caring for 121 orphans in Ukraine and sponsors children in at-risk families in larger numbers: 750 in Ukraine, 93 in Russia's Mari El Republic, and 16 in the vicinity of Kazan, in Russia's Tatar Republic.<sup>84</sup> How such humanitarian assistance merited Jeff Thompson's deportation remains a mystery.

A similar miscarriage of justice would appear to be the case in the police closure of Moscow-based NGO Miramed, and the arrest of one of its administrators on 6 May 2008. Acclaimed for its innovative work in combating trafficking of Russian women and its assistance for orphan graduates, it would seem more appropriate for the Russian government to be honoring Miramed with awards, rather than threatening its existence.<sup>85</sup>

As of October 2007 new Russian residency and visa regulations for non-citizens pose another major new impediment to Western ministry. Humanitarian, religious worker, and business visas, even if issued for one year, permit registration and residence in Russia for, at most, 90 days out of any 180-day period. Receiving a residence permit or a work visa has alleviated this difficulty for some. However, the time, effort, and bureaucratic hurdles involved in securing such documents may substantially curtail missionary service in Russia. Foreign worker quotas set separately for each of Russia's regions further complicate the picture.<sup>86</sup> Some Western missionaries already have gone home, others have moved to Ukraine, Georgia, and other former Soviet republics, while others have opted to endure the disruption of 90

---

<sup>83</sup> Geraldine Fagan, "Russia: Visa Changes Leave Religious Communities in Limbo," Forum 18 News Service, 24 April 2008; Jeff Thompson, *Leaving the American Sector* (Hemet, CA: Theatron Books, 2007). Jeff Thompson, "An Open Door to Russian Prisons," *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 15 (Summer 2007), 5-7; and 15 (Fall 2007), 12-14. See also the Eastern European Outreach website: <http://www.eeo.org>.

<sup>84</sup> Jeff Thompson interview, 18 January 2008.

<sup>85</sup> E-mail from Juliette M. Engel, CEO, Miramed, May 2008.

<sup>86</sup> "Foreigners Have to Go Home to Get Russian Visas," BusinessNewsEurope.eu, 24 January 2008; Fagan, "Russia: Visa Changes"; Conor Sweeney, "EU Slams Russia Over Visa Red Tape," *Moscow Times*, 9 April 2008, p.3.

days in – 90 days out, in hopes of a future, less restrictive visa regime.<sup>87</sup>

Of course, restrictions on foreign missionaries do not necessarily spell the withering away of indigenous churches or Christian outreach. The growth of the church in China after missionaries were expelled, 1949-1951, would be an example. And, in fact, more than a few Western ministries in Russia are genuinely striving to develop indigenous leadership. One encouraging example is Katya Shabalriova, raised in an orphanage in the Vladimir Region, who was among the first to receive benefit from the outreach of Children's HopeChest. This orphan graduate married in 2000, is active with her husband in the Wesleyan Church in Vladimir, completed a university degree in social work, and was hired in 2007 by CHC to direct its independent living program for orphan graduates in Vladimir.<sup>88</sup>

A sixth trend regarding Russia's children at risk, and one of the most troubling, is the increasingly rapid spread of HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus)/AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) among them. Sobering statistics underscore the threat.

- One percent of Russia's population (approximately 1.4 million) is HIV-infected, giving Russia the third highest number of cases among all countries outside Africa.<sup>89</sup>
- Over 80 percent of Russia's HIV-infected population are youth ages 15 to 30, with orphans and street children among the most vulnerable groups.<sup>90</sup>
- "In Russia, street children who have lived in orphanages are two times more likely to be HIV positive than those who grew up in homes."<sup>91</sup> Susan Hillis of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports that 37 percent of Russian youth ages 15 to 19 who are living on the streets are HIV positive.<sup>92</sup> Hillis warns of the growing synergy between HIV/AIDS and Russia's children at risk, meaning orphans and street children are fueling the country's HIV epidemic while the epidemic, in turn, threatens to fuel an upsurge in the number of

---

<sup>87</sup> Jeff Thompson interview, 18 January 2008.

<sup>88</sup> George Steiner interview, 3 January 2008.

<sup>89</sup> UNAIDS, *2006 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic* (New York; UNAIDS, 2006).

<sup>90</sup> Susan Hillis, 3 February 2008, cited in Cristi Hillis and Karmen Friesen, "Russia's Growing AIDS Epidemic," *East-West Church and Ministry Report* 16 (Spring 2008), 1; Davis, *Red Letters*, 82.

<sup>91</sup> Dmitry M. Kissin *et al.*, *HIV Zero-prevalence in Street Youth in St. Petersburg, Russia* (Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007); Hillis and Friesen, "Russia's Growing AIDS Epidemic," 1; Kathryn Utan, "Collateral Damage: HIV/AIDS Creates a Generation of Orphans and Vulnerable Children," *CommonHealth* (Spring 2005), 61.

<sup>92</sup> Susan Hillis, "HIV and Orphans: Synergistic Epidemics in the Russian Federation," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007.

homeless children, as in Africa.<sup>93</sup> CDC projects an additional 500,000 Russian orphans in the next ten years as a result of parents dying of HIV.<sup>94</sup>

After years of half measures, the Russian government is now taking the HIV/AIDS threat more seriously. State funding for HIV/AIDS and hepatitis programs rose from \$140 million in 2006 to \$300 in 2007, with \$392 pledged for 2009.<sup>95</sup> In the fight against the AIDS epidemic USAID, UNAIDS, and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) are all working closely with Russian authorities, with NGOs, and in some cases, with Christian ministries.<sup>96</sup> Selected examples of projects to combat HIV/AIDS follow.

1. Doctors of the World is working with CDC, providing HIV testing, medical treatment, and counseling to St. Petersburg street children.<sup>97</sup>
2. AIDS Care Education Training (ACET) "has over 300 HIV educators actively working in 90 cities and towns across Russia."<sup>98</sup>
3. Russian Pentecostals sponsor a number of drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers, such as at Kingisepp (Leningrad Region), that treat HIV-infected clients.<sup>99</sup>
4. The Russian Orthodox Church began addressing the AIDS issue in 2001, focusing on prevention, spiritual counseling and social support, and hospice care.<sup>100</sup>
5. Campus Crusade for Christ and Children's HopeChest have collaborated on a Crossroads curriculum designed to foster character development and healthy choices among Russian orphans to avoid HIV infection and drug and alcohol abuse.<sup>101</sup>
6. Peter Deyneka Russian Ministries hosted a 2006 "HIV/AIDS Forum of Good

---

<sup>93</sup> Hillis and Friesen, "Russia's Growing AIDS Epidemic," 1. See also Utan, "Collateral Damage," 62.

<sup>94</sup> Hoppe, "Bezprizorniki," 33; Mark R. Elliott, "I Will Not Leave You as Orphans. I Will Come to You," *East-West Church and Ministry Report 8* (Summer 2000), 16; www.eastwestreport.org.

<sup>95</sup> Hillis and Friesen, "Russia's Growing AIDS Epidemic," 1; David Novak, "Russia 'Not Ready' for Tough HIV Measures," *Moscow Times*, 7 May 2008.

<sup>96</sup> Hillis and Friesen, "Russia's Growing AIDS Epidemic," 1.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 2; Kissin, *HIV*.

<sup>98</sup> Hillis and Friesen, "Russia's Growing AIDS Epidemic," 3; Angela Baker interview, 4 June 2008.

<sup>99</sup> Hillis and Friesen, "Russia's Growing AIDS Epidemic," 5.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*; Matt Kavgian, "An HIV/AIDS Ministry Partnership in Eastern Europe and Russia," *East-West Church and Ministry Report 15* (Fall 2007), 1-3; George Steiner interview, 3 January 2008; Angela Baker interview, 4 June 2008. Dr. Beryl Hugen, Calvin College, is currently completing a two-and-a-half year evaluation of the effectiveness of the Crossroads curriculum in selected Russian orphanages. Beryl Hugen interview, 6 June 2008.

- Practice and Networking” in Moscow with the help of Britain’s Tearfund. It also supports the work of “The Beginning of Life” in Moldova, a ministry devoted to AIDS prevention and care for AIDS victims.<sup>102</sup>
7. The HIV/AIDS Initiative of Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, California, under the leadership of Kay Warren, has hosted three conferences, 2005-2007, on “AIDS and the Church,” with growing attention given to the spread of AIDS in Russia.<sup>103</sup>

### **Under-Researched Aspects of Outreach to Russian Children at Risk**

Aspects of ministry to children at risk that require a great deal more investigation include Russian Orthodox, Catholic, and mainline Protestant efforts. Anecdotally, I am aware that many Orthodox orphanages have been opened in the past 15 years. For example, Baroness Cox, through Christian Solidarity International, has assisted Father Alexander Borisov’s parish of Saints Kosmos and Damian in its sponsorship of the “Our Family” Orphanage in Moscow.<sup>104</sup> Also, I have had the privilege, as noted, of visiting the vibrant Kovalyovo Orthodox Orphanage in the Kostroma Region that runs its own farm and places children within the orphanage in family units with house parents. Moscow’s Sts. Martha and Mary Convent operates a shelter for homeless girls. By reputation I know of the work of Sister Margarita Nelyubova of the Moscow Patriarchate Department of External Relations, who is energetically working to combat the spread of AIDS and to assist Russian orphans. And Moscow’s Roman Catholic Virgin Mary Immaculate Conception Church administers a shelter for homeless children funded by the Salesian Order in Italy.<sup>105</sup> Still a great deal more research needs to be done to determine the breadth of Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant orphan outreach and what needs these churches address.

Following is an illustration of the extent to which efforts can go undetected. This author has been traveling to the Soviet and post-Soviet Union since 1974, and over the decades frequently has fellowshipped with my fellow Methodists - first in Estonia, and, in more recent years, in Russia and Ukraine. Since 2000, I have led six groups to work with Russian orphans in the Vladimir, Kostroma, and Ryazan Regions. But in just the past months, in researching Russian children at risk, I have greatly expanded my

---

<sup>102</sup> Hillis and Friesen, “Russia’s Growing AIDS Epidemic,” 2.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*; Andrew Lossau interview, 30 April 2008.

<sup>104</sup> Anita Deyneka interview, 4 January 2008; <http://www.rondtb.msk.ru/>.

<sup>105</sup> Karmen Friesen interview, 4 January 2008; Ivanov, *In-Depth Analysis*, 71-72.

knowledge of United Methodist efforts on behalf of homeless Russian and Ukrainian children. For some time I have known of Mission Society for United Methodist work with orphans in the Russian Far East, and more recently I learned of the United Methodist “Daybreak” drop-in center for street children in Kyiv, Ukraine.<sup>106</sup> Likewise, Methodist pastor Oksana Petrovna has been ministering in St. Petersburg orphanages for 12 years and regularly includes orphans in her church’s summer camp program.<sup>107</sup> But much more Methodist outreach is occurring than I previously realized. Between 1997 and 2007, for example, Rev. Kathryn Adams, Wesley Foundation director at Youngstown State University, Youngstown, Ohio, led 15 mission teams to work with orphans in Russia and Belarus.<sup>108</sup> Also, I discovered the herculean exploits of Rev. Tom Clark, director of United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (VIM) for the state of West Virginia. He has organized 76 United Methodist short-term mission teams to the former Soviet Union since 1994, and he has personally led two dozen of these trips. It is noteworthy that 85 to 90 percent of these mission efforts have involved outreach to Russian orphans – in Moscow, Sergiev Posad, Orel, and elsewhere. Most recently, in February 2008, Rev. Clark’s mission team distributed 2,000 Christmas presents to orphans in Moscow.<sup>109</sup> Thus, Kathryn Adams and Tom Clark represent part, but not all, of what one Western mainline denomination in two U.S. states is doing on behalf of Russian orphans. This partial sampling of United Methodist efforts suggests that, certainly, a great deal more is to be learned concerning mainline Protestant, Orthodox, and Catholic outreach to Russian children at risk.

Other phenomena, also largely unexamined, involve assistance given by Western adopting families to the home orphanages of their newly adopted children and the efforts of Christian ministries to work with Russian street children. Additional under-reported efforts on behalf of Russian children at risk are undoubtedly underway.

In the 1980s I compiled data on Western-based East European missions, discovering in the process that beyond the several hundred incorporated non-profits identified, additional and myriad projects were afoot in Western Europe and the

---

<sup>106</sup> “The United Methodist ‘Daybreak’ Drop-in Center for Street Children in Kiev, Ukraine,” 26 July 2007, News section of United Methodist Church in Eurasia website: <http://www.umc-urasia.ru>.

<sup>107</sup> Oksana Petrovna interview, 28 May 2008; Jim Athearn interview, 5 January 2008.

<sup>108</sup> Kathryn Adams interview, 3 January 2008.

<sup>109</sup> Tom Clark interview, 15 January 2008.

United States organized by local congregations, even by individuals and their extended families.<sup>110</sup> I labeled such initiatives “kitchen-table” organizations to emphasize their informality and their grassroots character. I am convinced that the same phenomenon exists today as regards Western and indigenous Russian outreach to children at risk.

Let me conclude with two contrasting generalizations. 1) Much is being done, more than most observers realize, and perhaps more than will ever fully be known, to extend love and care to Russian orphans and street children. 2) Conversely, all efforts combined to date do not begin to meet the present need. Nor do current efforts appear to be capable of meeting the increasing future needs posed by Russia’s looming AIDS crisis and the orphaned children it will leave in its wake. Thus, no room exists for either complacency or despair. A great deal still needs to be done. At the same time, Christian faith is a powerful source of hope, whatever the obstacles. As we read in I Corinthians 16:9 “A great door for effective work has opened to me, *and* there are many who oppose me.” St. Paul reminds us that obstacles are to be expected, but they are no excuse for surrender.

## Interviews

- Kathryn Adams, Wesley Foundation, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, Ohio, 3 January 2008.  
Jim Athearn, Coordinator, Russia Initiative of the General Board of Global Ministries, United Methodist Church, Clear Brook, Virginia, 5 January 2008.  
Angela Baker, Association for Spiritual Renewal, Moscow, Russia, 4 June 2008.  
Tom Clark, Director, West Virginia Volunteers in Mission, United Methodist Church, Summersville, West Virginia, 14 January 2008.  
Zhanna Danilova, RiskNetwork, Moscow, Russia, 2 June 2008.  
Anita Deyneka, President, Peter Deyneka Russina Ministries, Wheaton, Illinois, 14 January 2008; 4 April, 2008, Moscow, Russia.  
Nikolai Dimitriev, Children’s HopeChest, Kostroma, Russia, 22 June 2008.  
Karmen Friesen, Director, CoMission for Children at Risk, Mount Joy, Pennsylvania, 4 January 2008.  
Korvan Funk, Children’s HopeChest, Vladimir, Russia, 18 June 2008.  
Cristi Hillis, CoMission for Children at Risk, Atlanta, Georgia, 16 January 2008.  
Susan Hillis, epidemiologist, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, Georgia, 16 January 2008.  
Beryl Hugen, Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan; interviewed in Moscow, 6 June 2008.  
Andrew Lossau, HIV/AIDS Initiative, Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, California, 30 April 2008.  
Galina Obrovets, *Sestra* Magazine, Moscow, Russia, 4 June 2008.  
Oksana Petrovna, United Methodist pastor, St. Petersburg, Russia, 28 May 2008.  
George Steiner, CEO, Children’s HopeChest, Colorado Springs, Colorado, 3 January 2008.  
Maria Ternovskaya, Director, Orphanage 39, Moscow, Russia, 14 May 2001.  
Jeff Thompson, President, Eastern European Outreach, La Murrieta, California, 18 January 2008.  
Georgia Williams, Russian Orphan Opportunity Fund, Moscow, Russia, 13 March 2001.

---

<sup>110</sup> Mark R. Elliott, *East European Missions Directory* (Wheaton, IL: Institute for the Study of Christianity and Marxism, 1989).