

Yaroslavl Final Evaluation Report

prepared by

MiraMed Foundation

for

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MiraMed Institute is 5013c public charity founded in 1992.

The Miramed Mission:

To provide programs of social protection, education, training and self-sufficiency and advocacy for orphans, disadvantaged children and young adults in Russia; to provide direct humanitarian aid, medicine, food and supplies to orphanages in need; to educate and advocate for the elimination of sexual trafficking of girls and young women from Russia and the former Republics and to assist in their rescue, return and rehabilitation.

Women and Children First is a registered Russian NGO founded by Miramed Institute in 2002 to develop new programs for at risk children and young people.

The Women and Children First Mission:

To help all children develop to their full potential, have equal rights, and be integrated into society.

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www.miramedinstitute.org

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Introduction

Three projects funded by Friends of Russian Orphans were evaluated:

- a) Staff Professionalism
- b) School of Life
- c) Mentoring Program for orphanage graduates

The following methods were used for the evaluation:

Analysis of documentation (project proposals: aims and project activities, internal project methodology, School of Life course materials)

Interviews and group discussions with project participants (project leaders, trainers, *vospitatels* who participated in the course, teenagers).

The first evaluation visit was conducted February 2006 and the second in July 2006. Evaluation meetings were held with project participants at the Yaroslavl Regional Center of State Education “Center of Child Support,” Leninski orphanage and internat No 9.

Taken together these projects form an important part of a long term strategy for improving the quality of care of children in institutions and helping graduates of orphanages to reintegrate successfully into society.

We have identified three key strategic goals

- 1) Raising the professional skills of orphanage staff
- 2) Development and implementation of support and skills training programs for children and young people in orphanages and for graduates of orphanages
- 3) Promoting systematic changes to the organization of care provision for children in Yaroslavl orphanages in line with contemporary standards based on Russian and international research.

1. Staff Professionalism – an instrument for improving quality of life of children in orphanages.

The project is conducted by the Yaroslavl Regional Center of State Education “Center of Child Support.”

Project Director, Ivanova T.A.

This project aims to raise the professionalism of *vospitatels*, the adults who provide day to day care for children in orphanages. At the start of this project *vospitatels* had received no specialized training for working with children in orphanages and no specialized courses were available at Yaroslavl institutions of higher education. *Vospitatels* were not motivated towards professional development and received no professional support.

In view of this difficult starting point, we consider that the important tasks for year one were:

- To improve *vospitatels*’ (orphanage staff care givers) understanding of their professional rather than personal roles in caring for children and to increase their motivation towards professional growth.
- To identify *vospitatels*’ training needs in order to plan course content for years two and three of this project.
- To raise awareness of Yaroslavl officials, academics and professionals of the importance of professional training for orphanage staff.
- To develop systems for monitoring changes in *vospitatels*’ motivation, learning, and their practical application of learning in day to day work with children.

- To identify the position of this project in the context of long term institutional change in Yaroslavl orphanages. This was not an original aim in the project proposal, but we feel it raises important questions about how this project relates to the other to FRO projects and long term strategic planning by Friends of Russian Orphans

1.1 Significant achievements at the end of year one:

1. *Increased motivation of participants* (orphanage staff) towards professional development. Indicators include more expansive answers to questionnaires used by the group, good attendance at seminars. *Vospitatels* have completed the first stage of professional growth. They have been motivated to gain new knowledge and skills. This is an excellent result for year one and will provide the basis for successful learning in year two of the project.
2. *The first formal training program has been created specifically for orphanage staff in Yaroslavl.* The course has been given official status (with certification for course participants) by the Yaroslavl Institute for Professional Training. This will ensure that in the future *vospitatels* will have opportunity to receive professional training at the Institute of Professional Training.
3. The course has received positive recommendations from local experts.
4. Course leaders have learned about the specific needs of orphanage staff and children and have used this learning for planning the next year of the project. Prior to this course they did not have experience of providing training to *vospitatels*.

1.2. Project Strengths

Course Content has been designed to motivate course participants towards professional development

In year one the course was built around issues which course participants identified as being important. This participant-led approach helped to motivate the *vospitatels* and has been a successful tactic in the first year. Furthermore, the course incorporated *vospitatels'* requests for practical skills training. For example a learning difficulties specialist (*defectolog*) conducted a course with practical recommendations for orphanage staff. A course on project planning provided an interesting form of cooperation between orphanage staff and children as well as building problem solving skills

The course successfully addresses the psychological needs of *vospitatels* and provides information and training which can improve the quality of their day to day communication with children.

The course material used for year one has been well systematized.

Project personnel have demonstrated high level of professionalism.

Course participants' increased motivation and interest is largely due to the professionalism of the trainers who conducted the course. Trainers were able to use their professional knowledge to respond to questions *vospitatels* had about specific children and directed the course towards *vospitatels*' practical questions.

Project personnel recognize that *vospitatels* have complex training needs and they have been creative in seeking new methods and sources of information for them.

Project evaluation has been developed appropriately for year one and additional forms of evaluation are planned for year two.

A professional researcher from the Center of Help to Children (The Center) conducted evaluation of course participants' motivation in year one of the project (We reviewed an evaluation conducted earlier this year and are waiting to receive a copy of the latest research in order to provide further comments).

Key target groups for evaluation in year two have been identified:

- Participants (*vospitatels*)
- Children
- Orphanage Directors (administrators)

In year two we expect that it will be possible to monitor participants learning and practical application of skills and knowledge gained through participation in the course.

The Project includes wider awareness rising of the importance of professional development for orphanage staff

The project has support from the Department of Education for Yaroslavl and the Department of Education for Yaroslavl *oblast*. Furthermore, project activities for year two include a conference on "professionalism amongst *vospitatels*" which is a good way to raise awareness of project achievements and encourage further support for this work from the Yaroslavl administration and amongst the orphanage directors and the *vospitatels*.

1.3 Project weaknesses

Course Content

Whilst the course has addressed the emotional needs of *vospitatels* and their communication with children, it does not yet address the specific psychological issues of institutionalized children. The Center has applied to a St Petersburg institution for education for a specialist course on “the psychology of orphans.” It will be very important to include this material in future training for *vospitatels* as this material will provide the core for further course development.

We would like to see an emphasis on: socialization (social adaptation or social competency training) within the professionalism course as socialization is a key component of *vospitatels* work with children and young people. Methods for organizing socialization are not developed or widely understood by orphanage staff at most orphanages. This is because Ministry of Education guidelines standards for orphanages do not yet include detailed guidelines on how orphanages should organize the process of socialization or how to assess children’s levels of social competency. However, new standards are likely to address these issues in the near future.

The issue of social competency training for young people is addressed by the other Friends of Russian Children Projects (School of Life and the Mentoring Program). We therefore feel there could be more linkage between these projects. For example, the professional course content could be developed to include training on how to build skills (individual work and group work) and on how to build social networks.

Evaluation methodology

In year one it was not possible to evaluate professional changes in day to day work with children. This is perhaps not a weakness of the project, but rather is due to the complex training needs of the *vospitatels* and their low motivation at the start of this project. However, it is not yet clear how, in year two, the project leaders will monitor course participants’ practical application of knowledge and skills learned. The question of how to monitor changes in the *vospitatels*’ day to day work will need to be addressed in years two and three of the project.

1.4 Recommendation for project development

Evaluation

We recommend a fourth area of research (in addition to the three target groups listed above) in order to evaluate changes in the psychological climate in the orphanages participating in this project.

It would be effective to use focus groups for gathering information from children as questionnaires tend to result in answers which are “socially acceptable” rather than the children’s personal opinions.

Orphanage staff need to be taught to evaluate their own work with an understanding of the conditions they work in and the specific needs of children. One way to do this is through a support group for *vospitatels* with a qualified supervisor to help link theory to practical experience. This would provide the supervisor with information on how effectively the *vospitatels* are using the training in their day to day work and be an additional mechanism for project evaluation.

Development of long term systematic training opportunities for orphanage staff.

With regard to professional training for orphanage staff a long term systematic program of support and training is required for all orphanage staff. We recommend that long term strategies include the expansion of training programs for orphanages to include new target groups (administrators, psychologists, social pedagogues). Unless all orphanage staff have a good understanding of their functions and shared goals in providing care for children it will be very difficult for even for trained *vospitatels* to implement best practice in their day to day work.

In the near future the Ministry of Education will issue new quality standards for orphanages with guidelines on staff functions. These guidelines will provide structure for training orphanage staff and may help to prioritize training issues for orphanage staff.

It may be beyond the scope of this course and the three year project, however, in the longer term, programs for staff professionalism would probably need to include training for orphanage staff on the following topics (N.B. the list is not complete):

- Team work (roles of psychologist, social pedagogue, *vospitatels*, administration)
- Individual and group work skills and techniques for work with children and young people.
- Working with children of different age groups.
- Maintaining old support networks, developing new support networks.

In order to address the above issues it is important to consider all the potential Yaroslavl resources for providing training and conduct a full analysis of all the training/education institutions which may be able to access city funding for work with orphanage staff.

Institutional changes which are promoted through training programs also need to be formalized through legislation and local funding.

2. School of Life Program.

Project Director: Bauymova, Svetlana Viktorovna

At the start of this project orphanages did not have a structured program to prepare teens for independence. Research conducted by Friends of Russian Orphans showed that teens in their final at an orphanage experience anxiety about leaving and coping with independent life. The aims of the project described in the project application were to

provide emotional support, information and skills to teens in their final year in orphanages in order to prepare them for independence.

2.1 Significant Achievements.

- *Creation of a structured plan for individual support for young people in their final year at orphanages.*
- *Increased knowledge of topics taught amongst participants.*

2.2 Project Strengths

- School of Life helps to reduce anxiety about young people's futures amongst both *vospitatels* and young people by focusing on future plans; information young people will need in the future, and by encouraging the development of a supporting relationship between *vospitatels* and young people.
- The individual approach used in this course maximizes opportunities for adapting the course content to the specific needs and interests of each young person.
- The development of a structured course provides guidance to *vospitatels* on which information young people need for independent living.
- The course has strong support from the Department of Education and cooperation with other teaching institutions.
- The Institute of Development has agreed to edit the School of Life Program starting in September.

2.3 Weaknesses

- Course participants are given information, but there is not a system for teaching skills and therefore much of this information will not be used by young people when they begin independent life.
- Many skills young people need to adapt successfully to adult life need to be developed from an early age.
- There is not enough information for *vospitatels* on some topics. *Vospitatels* have not been trained to talk to children about topics (For example, family, legal issues, HIV prevention) which require specialist knowledge and teaching skills.
- Although knowledge was tested through a group activity at the end of the year there was no assessment of the skills individual young people have upon graduation.

Participants of a group discussion about the School of Life program (vospitatels, representative of the Department of Education, an orphanage graduate, mentors) made many insightful comments which illustrate the points made below:

- There is "not enough information on healthy life styles and organizations which provide health care".

- “No information about health and family, health and the future generation.
- “The course should be extended as there is not currently enough time allocated to gain knowledge effectively and build skills”.
- “ The course does not include enough practical activities (For example, using kitchen equipment, cooking) “
- Lack of information on legal issues, housing.
- “Day to day routines in orphanage do not provide opportunities for practicing and developing skills. This means that some topics included in the course, such as budgeting, are not reinforced in practice.
- “ Orphanages do not have facilities to teach cooking skills because of sanitation regulations”
- “ The course could be conducted twice a week and *vospitatels* could include more practical activities”
- “More independence could be given to children whilst they live at the orphanages in order to resolve real life situations they encounter such as getting a passport, going to the army headquarters

2.4 Areas for Development.

- The course needs to be restructured. Some topics in the School of Life Program may need to be covered in more depth and include practical skills building. Other topics may need to be taught at an earlier age.
- Group work may be appropriate for some skills building (For example social skills).
- As skills building is an aim of this course, it is important to decide which are the most important skills to teach to young people in their final year at orphanages. Course developers need to consider limitations of time, the pace at which skills can be learned and opportunities for practicing skills. For example, an important skill is the ability to ask for help (this might include being able to make a phone call and communication skills, etc.). Many skills can be learned through games and roles plays!
- It is important to provide training to *vospitatels* on a) how to help young people develop skills, b) talking about difficult issues (for example, family)
- Supplementary information for *vospitatels* should be included to enhance the course materials.

- As the course now takes the form of individual conversation, training in basic counseling skills would be beneficial to help *vospitatels* to focus on issues and skills which are most important for individual children.
- Skills need to be developed and reinforced on a day to day basis in order for individual work conducted once a week to be effective.
- *For children of all ages* it is necessary to create an algorithm for skills development and for how and when training and assessment of skills will take place
- An algorithm for individual development for each child should be transferred to mentors. Assessment of skills learned by individual course participants and skills which need to be developed would provide mentors with information they need to plan and structure their work.
- It may be possible to create a “social hostel” for young people in the final year at the orphanage A flat is created within the orphanage for a small group of young people with facilities for cooking etc. This would provide conditions for young people to develop independent living skills prior to graduation. Social hostels have been created at orphanages in other regions.

3. Post Internat Mentoring program

Project Director: Bauymova, Svetlana Viktorovna

At the start of the project there was no formal system of support or life skills training for graduates of Yaroslavl orphanages. Young people who had left orphanages lacked the confidence and skills for independent living. Most did not cope successfully with adult life.

3.1 Significant achievements

- **Creation of an innovative system of support for orphanage graduates**
- **Raised confidence of orphanage graduates.**

3.2 Project Strengths

- Mentoring is one of the most appropriate forms of support to orphanage graduates as most lack skills and confidence required for independent living.
- Mentors are committed to supporting young people
- The project is supported by the Department of Education

- Program leaders have applied to the local authority for funding for mentor salaries. This will expand opportunities for recruitment of mentors from outside the orphanages.
- A comprehensive analysis has been conducted comparing orphanage graduates who did not take part in the mentoring program and those who did take part. We are waiting to receive a copy of the research in order to make further comments. The overall conclusion made during a presentation of these results was that young people with mentors appear to be more confident than those without mentors and more focused on age appropriate tasks (education, work). This is an excellent result!

3.3 Project Weaknesses

- There has been no evaluation of the experience of mentors participating in this project. This is important in order to establish the extent to which this program is sustainable in the long term.
- An algorithm of work with orphanage graduates has not yet been created. Based on the experience of the first year it is important to assess categories of children, skills, education at the start of mentoring and stages of the mentoring process. How long should mentoring last for different categories of children? What are the stages and methods for building skills, support networks? How is support reduced, over what time period?
- There is no strategy for handing over supporting roles to other adults.

3.4 Areas for Development

- To conduct a thorough evaluation of the views and experience of the mentors.
- To develop the system of training and support for mentors.
- To consider developing and expanding support networks for orphanage graduates to include other possible mentor figures (For example staff at vocational colleges, friends who are not orphans) and to start building support networks from an earlier age.
- To create an algorithm of work with orphanage graduates based on the practical experience of the mentors.

Conclusion

All three projects are innovative and strategically important. Maximum effect from these projects will be achieved if all participants understand they are contributing to one overall process, i.e. the socialization of orphans. The School of Life Program, if developed and expanded, should become a core program for preparing children for independence. This program needs to be developed in order to target all age groups in orphanages.

Vospitatels need additional support, information and skills to implement and develop the School of Life Program. At least part of this training could be provided within the Professionalism Course. Expansion of the training and support programs for orphanage staff and for mentors is needed, although some of this work may be beyond the scope of the current projects. The School of Life program could be developed to provide important skills training and orientation to independent living as the starting point for the mentoring

program. For year two and three it will be important to develop and integrate all three projects. An integrated approach between these projects will create a powerful force for improving the quality of care in Yaroslavl orphanages and support orphans' successful reintegration into society.

Finally, a very successful example of cooperation between civil society and state institutions has been achieved. Friends of Russian Orphans has played an important role in raising awareness of the needs of orphans and in promoting change and innovation using professional resources in Yaroslavl and other regions of the Russian Federation. Cooperation between civil society organizations and state organizations will be important to encourage further institutional change in orphanages in Russia.

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