Pacifist protest in school

The Tenth-Grade student versus the military

They threatened to mess up his permanent record if the tenth grader at a village school in the Arsky region did not take military training classes. The classes are required for boys as part of OBZh — a health and safety course taught in all Russian schools.

“I’m a pacifist. I think it’s just not right for me to assemble and disassemble automatic weapons. I don’t want to spend beautiful days in May playing war,” explained 17-year-old Kamil to the newspaper *Evening Kazan*.

This is the first case in Tatarstan where a student has openly refused to take part in the OBZh classes out of conviction. Up until now, if young people asked to be excused from the training, it was on grounds of poor health.

The student turned for help to *For Our Sons*, the advice centre for conscientious objectors and conscripts that is supported by Friends House Moscow.

*For Our Sons* took up his case. But they needed to find a way to stay in contact with him during the long and complicated process of arguing with the authorities.

With financial support from FHM, the advice office purchased an inexpensive mobile phone and loaned it to Kamil. With its help they kept in touch while Kamil wrote applications and filed appeals.

Meanwhile he did not report to the camp. He just kept going to school every day. And despite their earlier threats, the school administrators did not force the issue.

Instruction in preparedness for military service has been required for high school students, and also for those in pre-professional colleges or technical schools, since 2010, when it was established by order of the Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Educational Sciences of the Russian Federation.

In the last couple of years there have been similar cases of protest in different parts of Russia. Human rights workers are developing a proactive strategy. Along with the weapons training, they would like high schools to develop alternative programmes in peace skills — like firefighting or first aid.
Training for mediators
The "Seven Cities" project

Anton Konovalov is an expert in conflict resolution. He is an educational psychologist, and member of the Association of Curators of Mediation Services and Mediators, based in Moscow.

Anton came to us with a proposal to set up a nation-wide training programme for mediators. He planned to create instructional sessions for at least 200 educational specialists (psychologists, teachers, administrators), in which they would be trained as mediators and as initiators of reconciliation services. The work would take place in seven different regions of Russia.

Thus the project called, in Russian, "Peace to your Home" was born.

Wider outreach

In fact even more than seven cities were involved (see map). And the influence did not stop there. Much of the material has been videoed and placed online, including a webinar by a specialist from Ukraine who spoke about this kind of work in his country, and video lectures by Lyudmila Karnozova, an expert on restorative justice.

On his website, Anton has also added a collection of educational programs and manuals for young mediators in schools. These materials have been contributed by mediators from several different regions of Russia.

The first reconciliation services in Russia were created in 2001-2. They run more than 3,000 programmes annually involving 12,000 people.

Would you like someone to come and speak about FHM at your Meeting?

In the USA: email fhmsa@friendshousemoscow.org

In the UK and Europe: email fhmbc@friendshousemoscow.org
Alternatives to violence in Ukraine
International Peacemakers award

Alla Soroka of AVP Ukraine has received an International Peacemakers Award.

Every year since 1984, the Presbyterian Church (USA) has chosen twelve individuals who can help the church to more fully “embody and activate God’s vision of a just and peaceful world”.

There have been 250 awards to people from 60 different countries. The recipients visit the United States to meet with congregations, colleges and communities.

Alla Soroka is a leading light of the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) in Ukraine. This work is supported by Friends House Moscow and by the US charity This Child Here, for which Alla works as project manager in Odessa.

Much of AVP Ukraine’s recent work has been with refugees from the war in eastern Ukraine, especially the displaced children. AVP workshops build trust between people and teach skills in dealing peacefully with conflict situations. About her work, Alla writes:

"In the atmosphere of acceptance and freedom, participants are given the opportunity to work and deal with conflicts. I felt and realized people must appreciate each other. When they can listen to each other without criticism, when they practice these skills, they create an atmosphere of healing."

Quakers in Philadelphia were delighted to meet Alla, especially because it was her birthday. It was celebrated with a dinner, a concert, and some birthday cake. Alla wrote: "I was unbelievably happy to observe my birthday with Friends. This was very unexpected; it was the surprise of surprises! But I am so happy that it was in this company!"

One of the dinner guests was Friend Chuck Esser, who helped to develop the very first AVP programmes. AVP was originally created by Quakers for peace work in American prisons in the 1970s.

It is a wonder to see AVP practices reflected back, gifted back, to us from Ukraine, where trainers have applied it in different situations, and have developed particular strategies for work with children and young people.

AVP in Moscow

The AVP group in Moscow has been inactive for a while, but work is starting up again. The facilitators have been using our Moscow office for regular meetings. In September they held a workshop. One of the participants wrote about it on Facebook:

"Hooray! "Alternative to violence" is alive !!! Because there are interested people! We will continue 😊"

What does your donation buy? Some examples from recent projects..

$27 (£21) - phone, postage etc. for 6 months (school mediation project)

$120 (£95) - one issue of a newsletter for conscientious objectors

$450 (£360) - projector (children with special needs project)

$1,430 (£1,145) - programme coordination for 1 month (refugee school)

$1,300 (£1,040) - Quaker outreach website work for 1 month
Outreach in the Russian language

Our very own ISBN numbers!

Friends House Moscow is now a publishing house, thanks to the past five years of funding from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. The project has yielded twelve books translated into Russian, and numerous shorter texts posted regularly on the Russian language website and in Russian Wikipedia.

Underpinning this is the development of in-house expertise by FHM staff in the translation and editing of Quaker texts, and the cultivation of a group of translators who have acquired an understanding of Quaker ways of thinking.

Popular downloads so far are Beyond Majority Rule, by Michael Sheeran, Elizabeth Fry, a Biography, by June Rose, Rethinking War and Peace, by Diana Francis, and Notes from an Exhibition, by Patrick Gale.

Publishing far and wide...

The translations feed into topics for discussion on FHM’s Russian facebook page, on its equivalent vKontaktey, in online courses under the auspices of Woodbrooke, and the Meditation Group run twice a month in the Moscow office and open to the public.

Recently we had an enquiry as follows:

“We are a group of Quakers worshipping in the Canary Islands. We have Russian visitor attending our meeting who has asked if Quaker Faith & Practice is published in Russian. I am unable to find the answer. Maybe you can give me more information about this?”

And of course we could! QF&P was an early translation by FHM. Another example is a Quaker in Poland who uses FHM translations as she speaks Russian but not English.

What next? The challenge for FHM is building on these foundations now that the JRCT grant has been spent. One model is a grant from The Retreat Quaker Psychiatric Hospital, in York, to fund the publication of The Retreat by Samuel Tuke in Russian. Ideas for partnerships of this kind are welcome.

FHM supports projects that promote peace and transform lives in the countries of the former Soviet Union.

Join us in our work

Please donate to Friends House Moscow

Donate online at www.friendshousemoscow.org or send donations to:

In Europe: Friends House Moscow Unit 14451 PO Box 6945 London W1A 6US, U.K.

In North America: Friends House Moscow Support Association PO Box 60253 Palo Alto, CA 94306, USA

Donations to the U.S. address or online in US $ are tax-deductible on U.S. tax returns.

Can you volunteer to help?

Could you help publicise our work and raise funds? Email info@friendshousemoscow.org for details

The online library page for "Elizabeth Fry, a Biography", with links to download in .doc, .pdf, .epub and .mobi formats

Stories on the front page of the website: "How hard it is to find a good Quaker" and "Mary Pennington and Isaac Pennington"