Pathways to employment in the Russian city of Dzerzhinsk

245 miles east of Moscow lies the city of Dzerzhinsk, formerly a centre for the chemical weapons industry and still a highly polluted region. This is where Friends House Moscow has been running a project helping young people with physical and mental health problems to prepare for employment.

Those who take part are aged between 16 and 30. They have a variety of diagnoses, from autism and schizophrenia to epilepsy and congenital malformations. Some have problems with hearing and vision, or are suffering after effects of cancer treatment. Psychologists work to increase their motivation for work and develop employment skills, and also work with their families to ensure that they are well-supported at home. Here are some of their stories.

Nikita, Vlad and Oksana in "sand therapy", in which bulding stories allows a deep understanding of individual needs

NIKITA is 18 and has an autistic spectrum diagnosis. His mother said that “when he was 5 years old, it became evident that his peers were rejecting him..... It has always been terrifying for me to think of what will happen to my son when he grows up.” He was given training as a painter-plasterer, even though the work did not engage him at all. Now he is receiving individual tuition and is hoping to train for remote working on the internet, possibly as a programmer. He has even enjoyed attending group sessions and engaging with other students.

OLGA is 30 and has suffered since childhood from hearing loss. In the past she was employed in monotonous and tiring occupations. Her desire to be sociable and helpful to others was thwarted by her hearing problems and she became borderline depressed. Working with the psychologist, however, has resulted in a life-changing development - she now aims to write a blog, telling people about books she has read and which have helped her. She explains that because deaf people think in images and often read little, texts can be understood only if they are accompanied by sign language. She is hoping to be a guide for deaf people, helping them to find answers to vital questions.

OKSANA, 18 years old, was born with two club feet. She started in a special needs class but was moved to individual education, after which she lost interest in any activities and gave up contact with her friends. She was helped to find acceptable ways to express her negative feelings and began to develop self-confidence and self-esteem. Much-needed training in relaxation helped her to feel free from physical tensions and she is now able to express her hopes and fears. She is once again being educated with her peers, joining in group activities such as musical performances.
Friends House Moscow

Quakers United in Publishing - trans-Atlantic co-clerks from Moscow and the USA

At the 2019 annual meeting of Quakers Uniting in Publication (QUIP), Vanessa Juleye and Natasha Zhuravenkova were appointed as co-clerks. Vanessa is a member of Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting and on the staff of Friends General Conference; she is co-author of *Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship: Quakers, African Americans, and the Myth of Racial Justice*.

Natasha, the European co-clerk, is a member of Moscow Monthly Meeting and is on the staff of our FHM services provider company in Moscow. She is the translator and editor of numerous Quaker texts into Russian. Her first translation was of Pierre Lacout’s 1993 essay *God is Silence*, which describes how, in Quaker worship, words are "purified in a redemptive silence to bear the message of peace."

QUIP began in 1983 and is now an international network of over 50 Quakers and Quaker organizations. FHM is a member of QUIP.

European Young Friends meet in Russia

*Peter Doubtfire of Young Friends General Meeting (part of Britain Yearly Meeting) reports on the EMEYF Gathering in Russia in April 2019*

25 young adult Quakers and 10 children gathered in the village of Peski near St Petersburg for the Spring Gathering of European & Middle Eastern Young Friends (EMEYF). The theme of the week was ‘building bridges’. We took the opportunity to visit St Petersburg and to learn about the Russian Orthodox Church, sharing in local Easter celebrations. This brought up difficult questions for some of us, especially about the relationship between church and state, but was also a reminder that Quakers do not have a monopoly on transcendent spirituality.

We were pleased that several young Friends from Russia, Ukraine and Finland were more easily able to join due to the location, along with those from the more regularly represented Britain, Germany, and the Netherlands. Living as a community for the week, sharing worship, activities and meals helped break down cultural and language barriers, and strengthened the spiritual connection we feel across borders.

The Epistle from the EMEYF gathering (in Russian and in English) can be read here: https://bit.ly/2ScoaYH

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