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Newsletter Winter 2021

During the long months of the pandemic, the projects we support through Friends House Moscow have been keeping themselves up and running in various ways, and now we find that some are even expanding...

School books for migrant kids

"Equally Diverse" takes a 2,000 mile jump

The newest project on our list is called *Equally Diverse* (Одинаково разные). Started by teachers in the Kaluga region, it provides books, games and other learning materials to enable children of migrants to learn Russian, develop their communication skills, and learn about Russian life and culture. The project also runs seminars to help the teachers to make the most of these resources.

We already reported in a previous newsletter about the success of this project in the ten schools we helped to support. One of the books we provided was a children's book about local hero Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, a rocket scientist who is regarded as one of the founding fathers of modern aeronautics and gave his name to the State Museum of the History of Cosmonautics in the city.

Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, a local hero in Kaluga (from a children's book included in the Equally Diverse project)

This programme will be continued, and we are excited to learn that the Kaluga experience is due to be repeated in Novosibirsk, over 2000 miles to the east. The planned project will include a total of 600 children across ten schools and will involve speech therapists and parents as well as children and classroom teachers. Activities will include online and face-to-face meetings, running teachers' councils about diversity, and (it is hoped) arranging festivals and performances.

The team in Kaluga had been actively looking for an area of expansion, and because they already

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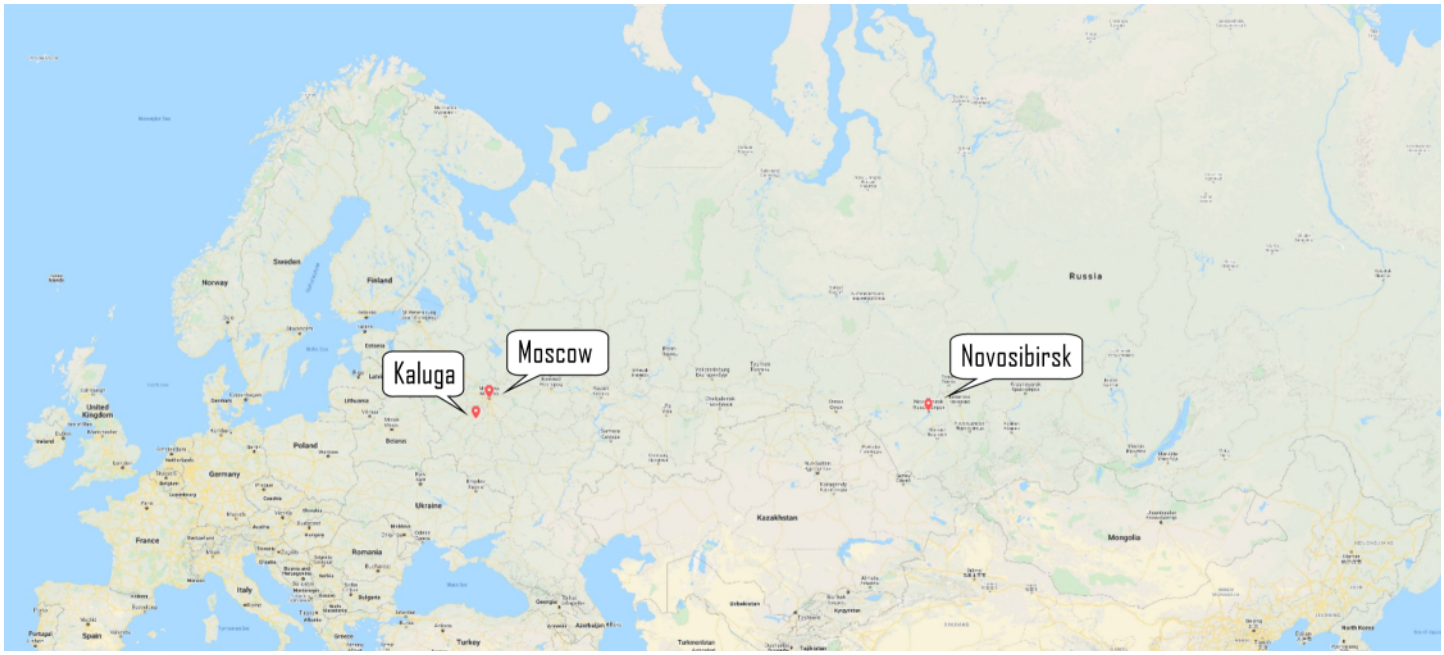

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had contacts with an educational charity in Novosibirsk, they had an understanding of the overall context in the region. The Minister of Education of Novosibirsk region took an interest and felt that the work was relevant, given that in some schools the pupil population consists of more than 50% of migrant children. So the transfer of skills and materials will be invaluable to the professional community in Novosibirsk, and we look forward to hearing more about this development.

"Big Change"

More English please!

In 2021 Big Change celebrated its 19th anniversary by arranging a special gathering where people baked apple pies together and watched a students' theatre programme. There was also a special Newsletter СПЕЦВЫПУСК ПУСК (pusk.bigchange.ru/19).

Friends House Moscow was the first organisation to support Big Change. It was set up to provide additional education and life skills for young people between the ages of 14 and 25, some of whom are living in orphanages, some have just left and are on the cusp of independence, some with foster families.

We still support the extra-curricular English Club which is very popular with the young people.

Learning a foreign language is an important step not only because it expands opportunities for further education, employment and travel, but also because it helps to grow the self-esteem of young people who, having been put into orphanages or correctional schools, have often been given the label of having "special educational needs" and provided with only a limited school curriculum.

Their potential has often been ignored, and it is a blessing to see how they flourish through the Big Change activities.

For the 2021-2022 school year Big Change plans to further expand the programme and offer the project "I'm learning English" that consists of two blocks: English language classes and the existing English club programme. We were happy to be able to support their plans with an increased grant.

An informal learning session at Big Change

The Refugee Centre

Hybrid working

A "core subject" lesson

The "Kids are Kids" programme (the Integration Centre for refugee and migrant children) continues to support the socialisation and education of children whose families have come to Russia from across the globe – from Afghanistan to Vietnam, from Angola to Egypt, from Congo to Uzbekistan.

They have come fleeing civil wars, human rights abuse, violence, political persecution and poverty. They arrive in Russia friendless and alone. Often the parents are unregistered, which makes it almost impossible for the children to be accepted into a mainstream school; this is where the Kids are Kids programme can help.

When the pandemic struck the work moved online. This year, it has become a mixture with some activities continuing online and some happening face to face.

After a music lesson

Zoom lessons of the core school subjects continued, including Russian, English, Maths, Social Science and Skills, and other subjects, with face-to-face Movement Therapy sessions for the smallest children. There were music lessons with Natalia B. and art therapy sessions with Sofia V. Young artists came to the centre to run Integration via Art sessions.

The centre helps dozens of children in different age-groups and 40 to 50 volunteers join in the activities to the great entertainment of all concerned.

In May, teens from the Centre participated in a charity marathon.

Summer gave the opportunity for outdoor events with regular walks in the parks for small groups of children, accompanied by coordinators and volunteers for safety.

Alternatives to Violence in Ukraine

The Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) in Ukraine runs practical workshops that teach people how to respond to difficult situations in nonviolent ways.

The skills taught in these workshops are invaluable not just for mediators and facilitators but also for psychologists, teachers, business owners, and civil servants. The group also have a focus on working with children and teenagers.

In 2021 the activities were conducted in person rather than online (online was tried after the pandemic started, but was less satisfactory). The fifth National AVP gathering took place in Odessa in July.

(AVP works internationally in many different countries. There is also an AVP group in Moscow who have started meeting again for one-day workshops in small groups.)

Publishing in the Russian language

A Publishing First!

A proof copy of the book cover

The highlight of 2021 has been the translation and publication of *Plague, Pestilence and Famine* by Muriel Payne.

It is timely, in this year of the anniversary of the famine relief, because in 1921 she went to Samara as a nurse in the Quaker Mission providing both famine relief and health services.

But ... copyright still applied as she only died in 1960: and she had no direct descendents to ask for permission.

The ensuing detective work to trace a great-niece and three great-nephews who were possible owners of copyright proved fruitful. The work done by their aunt was a revelation to them and they gladly gave the project their blessing.

A first for FHM has been the successful crowd funding for both an e-book and paper copies, far exceeding the target amount, and demonstrating the keen interest in this episode in Russia's history.

Vitaly Adamenko 1977 - 2021

Friends in Russia are mourning the death from COVID-19, at age only 44, of Vitaly Adamenko. He was a Tolstoyan, one who took part in Quaker meetings for worship and who translated and edited a number of Quaker texts. He was the founder of the electronic library, "Beyond Violence," the link to which you can find below.

This is a collection of texts on the theory and history of pacifism. Although he was a soft-spoken and gentle man, there is a video in which he very forcefully reminds a Russian audience that the right to conscientious objection to war is part of Russian history and tradition. "It is OURS!' he says. And so it is — the Russian state recognized the rights of conscientious objectors before Western nations did so!

Link to the "Beyond Violence" library:
http://antimilitary.ru
Link to a personal obituary written by our Friend Johan Maurer (includes links to videos by Vitaly):
Vitaly Vladimirovich Adamenko 1977-2021

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