

## Alan Wade - MY BELARUSSIAN EXPERIENCES.

I would like to begin by thanking the church and its members for the support they have given me in the past and for supporting the service on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> April at the candle lighting service to remember 30 years since the Chernobyl nuclear explosion.

It all started in 2003 after I read an article in The Evening Gazette (which Vera had to retrieve from the bin) looking for families to host children from Belarus for a month with the charity "Chernobyl Children Life Line". This had been founded in 1991. The children would benefit from our clean air, water and uncontaminated food which would help boost their immune system. We agreed that "we could do this" as our children had left home and we had 2 spare bedrooms. CCLL then was bringing 3,500- 5,000 children aged between 7-13 years over to England for respite holidays annually.

After hosting children and collecting clothes for their visits we needed someone to help us with the excess clothes. As they had been donated to Belarusian children we felt that that was where they should go. I contacted the charity Chernobyl Children's Project U.K. which we knew made deliveries to Belarus and yes they would be glad of our goods. After the second trip to Stockton I was asked "why don't you join us?" The rest is history.

I not only deliver goods to Belarus but what I enjoy is meeting the families of the children we have hosted and finding other children that Chernobyl Aid U.K. (Of which I am now a trustee) can help.

In 2005 while visiting a small village I was asked to go to a small wooden cottage called Rodney Kut. I met 5 severely disabled children, all aged 5. They all had individual diaries of the time they had been there. One shy little girl, slightly overwhelmed by 5 strange men visiting, came to the table where we were having a cup of tea. Her hand had come between us and she said "that's me" in English. A photo, taken 2 years previously, showed a child with one of 9 nurses bathing in a local river. She is called Ira. She previously lived in Vikov, a home with 300 occupants and lived in absolute squalor. She was brought to Rodney Kut with 4 others. Her friends were seated in special chairs and on bean bags, unable to walk. Their faces had little green patches as they were being treated for Impetigo. Ira had been brought to Devon and had had her legs amputated due to deformities and had only 2 fingers on each hand. The nine nurses were brought over to St. James hospital in Leeds to learn how to look after the children and their cottage was altered on the same lines as the ward in the hospital in England with a room for each child.



**The home for the mentally and physically disabled**

We had hoped to repeat this project with another unit. As time passed papa Sergei and his wife, who already had a disabled child, adopted the children and we found Ira's parent, who she now lives with, and her sister. She still comes to Devon annually, spending 3 months in an English school while she is fitted with new prosthetic legs and rides a bike and plays football.

Today and in the future some things have changed-others haven't. Disabled children and adults were treated as a disgrace and received no education or love but conditions are improving. In Gomel (which I know best) wheelchairs we have taken can be seen in the parks and a few disabled children have been accepted into School No 5 otherwise they live in various very small homes inadequately staffed or financed.

Information about the country and the contamination has been until very recently manipulated for whatever views you held. It's only now that I say to myself "yes I can believe that" and local authorities appear to have more say in what happens. I delivered aid to a small town called Cherikov near to the Russian border 3 hours driving north of Gomel. The first time Bob, my co-driver, and I went there we were welcomed by the children we had hosted, Susha and Alena, and their parents running across the town centre Park in the snow and taken for a BBQ with some fresh pork after taking our wagon to the customs compound.



**Alena with Susha's Family in Cherikov**

**A very welcome supper BBQ at -15 C**

We stayed with that family overnight. The next day we cleared customs and unloaded our wagon at the school into a customs shed which was then sealed by the late afternoon. We were taken to a teacher's home for a bite to eat and through our interpreter told that nobody was meant to eat the local food as it was badly contaminated. Everything we were given was imported. Checks on the children were annual. It is a very poor part of Belarus but beautiful. What did surprise us that when we asked about disabled people, the head master said there was no disabled people in Cherikov. Talking with Alexandra our interpreter as we left, she took us 200 yards up the road to the centre of town, knocked on the door of a typical Belarusian wooden cottage to be shown round a very cramped home for sixteen handicapped 3 – 18 year olds who just had a small orchard to walk in. At age 18 they are turned out of the home to look after themselves. When leaving we crossed the road to a beautiful small Russian Orthodox Church to chill out and pray.

Much of the aid went to the cancer hospital including wigs, bras and pants for teenage girls to give them confidence after their treatments. I have also on two occasions collected new high quality children's clothes and English leather shoes all in lovely boxes from Polly's, a little shop in Wingate. We are not meant to take new clothes and normally take the wrapping off and its UK label, but on this occasion these were so nice in their boxes I took them as they were. Having just had a few boxes of new bedding removed by the customs (which I really don't mind as it still helps the authorities.) I saw the customs officer s open one of the brown cardboard boxes just like the one thousand others I had on my wagon. Out came these lovely shoes and clothes earmarked for the hospital. My heart sank, only to notice him removing the wrappers and putting them back in the big box. When we had finished unloading I went across to the customs personnel and thanked them.



The beautiful small Church in Cherikov

Vera and I keep in touch with most of the 31 we have hosted with cards and phone calls. I phoned Susha at Christmas 2013, seven years since years she came to stay and 5 years since I had delivered aid the their school. When I asked about aid, this now 16 year old said “yes” on behalf of the schools with contact details. We approached the school who were highly delighted. We arrived in Cherikov in the autumn and I was surprised to see no gardens cultivated and the apples left on the trees and on the ground. It was only then that I realized that most of the population hadn’t bothered or did not know about the food situation 5 years before. Now every child is checked in hospital every 3 months, and if a child becquerel count is high then they spend 1 month in the local hospital until the level of radiation reduces to a safer level. What families have to do to help themselves is boil potatoes for three minutes then pour the water away and repeat this twice, then cook to finish off. Do not forage for food or fruits of the forest- mushrooms, brambles, cranberries etc. Also honey and birch juice is usually highly contaminated.

I left Cherikov with a heavy heart. We had stayed at Susha’s family home again. We all got up to leave the house at about 6.30 am and I noticed Dad cuddling Susha while Mum was doing some cooking for breakfast. She has an aneurism on her heart and she takes a while to get started on a morning. I had forgotten, but when she was with us in England, she would have a rest in the middle of the day and any real exertion would slow down whatever we were doing. When I got home I rang the charity CCLL to see if there was anything we could do to help. After contacting the family the message came back that there is nothing that can be done for her. Susha wants to be a doctor.

A new study recently released shows children 0-5 yrs old from new mothers who were themselves between 0-5 years old when the Chernobyl accident occurred are now the groups of people where the incidents of cancers are still rising - where other sections of the community are levelling out or falling slightly,

I am often asked what aid do we take, well it all depends what we are given and where it is going. As we are all volunteers we rarely buy anything, occasionally I will buy all sizes of football type balls but that’s about it. At present we are taking tonnes of hygiene product including incontinence pads and sanitary towels on every vehicle that goes.

*Dear Chernobyl Aid UK 01.05.2015*

*Once again we would like to express our appreciation to you for bringing over humanitarian aid. We would also like to say thank you to all your friends, colleagues, helpers and organisations that help you to collect and take the humanitarian aid over here.*

*Special thank you to the IKEA company. Earlier on we received a lot of goods produced by Ikea. In particular, bed covers, bedding sets, carpets, lamps, pots and pans, various furniture (sofa, fridges, bed side tables, chairs, arm chairs, children’s furniture). We always attempt to share the aid equally between all the members of our association (some chose chairs, others – bed side tables), while bed covers and bed linen would be given to every family. Besides it being necessary goods for our families, they also were pretty, functional and high quality.*

We also shared some aid with other organisations: we gave the fridge to the day care unit at social services centre for the young people with disabilities (the young people with disabilities learn cooking skills there), some of bed side tables went to residential unit at social services centre for people with disabilities and the elderly. Some other bed side tables were shared with Zhuravichi boarding home for children with disabilities. The wheelchairs went to the special needs centre and to Zhuravichi boarding home for children with disabilities.

When we received the mattresses, we shared most of them (40 mattresses) with the education department to be used at kindergartens. The washing powder was shared with social services centre to be used in the laundry. We are very grateful for the sets for the new born babies. They are very popular among members of our association as they are very needed but cost a lot to buy, especially in the crisis times when salaries are very small. The same applies to pushchairs, car seats, toys.

The children and their mothers who visit our classes are also very grateful for the craft materials, picture frames. It is hard to explain in full how much humanitarian aid is needed here. People are very thankful for all your kind help making their lives easier.

Once again many many thanks for your hard work, patience and support.

On behalf of members of the association,

Irina Laptev

Rogachev Association for Families of disabled children

Rogachev. Belarus.

**I have to pack aid for Belarus and have my wagon to manifest and load in the very near future. I usually do this on a Thursday. Any help would be much appreciated so please call on 01642-580986.**

**Thank you for time**

**Alan Wade.**

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***The Ultimate Kitchen Garden gives what it calls "the plan for the garden of your daily living".***

Plant three rows of peas:

1. Peace of mind
2. Peace of heart
3. Peace of soul

Plant four rows of squash

1. Squash gossip
2. Squash indifference
3. Squash grumbling
4. Squash selfishness

Plant four rows of lettuce

1. Lettuce be faithful
2. Lettuce be kind
3. Lettuce be patient
4. Lettuce really love one another

Plant three rows of turnips:

1. Turnip for meetings
2. Turnip for worship
3. Turnip to help one another

Plant three types of thyme:

1. Thyme for each other
2. Thyme for family
3. Thyme for friends

**It ends like this – *Water freely with patience and cultivate with love, and there will be much fruit in your garden because you reap what you sow.***

**But – make sure Jesus is there, advising you and supervising all you do!**