

Korczak in Kyrgyzstan

A travel report by Theo Cappon

FROM 22 OF AUGUST TILL 6 OF SEPTEMBER, we visited our Korczak friends in Kyrgyzstan. Mrs Bermet BARYKTABASOVA and her colleague Olga KAZARINA, both pediatricians, introduced us to people who work with children at risk. The pedagogical principles of Janusz Korczak underlay their approach and methods.

We visited:

Center for the Protection of Children

It is a non-government organisation working with street children in Bishkek. The main strategy is focussed on:

- Lobbying for the protection of the rights of street children
- Working with the mass media to present fuller information and suggest solutions
- Allowing the children and the parents to be heard-by giving them a voice in civil society.
- Providing basic services and developing alternatives

The Centre has created a network of programs aimed at supporting these children in the basic aspects of their lives. There is a food program (daily free and nutritious meals for 200 working children), a shelter program (providing temporal shelter for 30 homeless children), independent living program (they learn how to find a job and how to deal with money), medical program (to improve the health of street children), vocational skills program (to teach the children simple skills of taking care of themselves, repairing clothes, working with computer, etc.), education (replacement at schools or informal education by the social workers), participation (involving the target group in analyzing their situation to make them more self-reliant and self-confident).

International Exposure

Staff members have attended seminars, trainings and conferences in Geneva, Stockholm, Boechara and Saint Petersburg. While the CPC Centre learns from international experiences, it also seeks to inform the world about the Kyrgyzstan and the issues graced here.

After this meeting and visit, Bermet took us to the **“Children’s Rehabilitation Center’s Umut-Nadjeshda”**.

If parents in Kyrgyzstan are confronted with the birth of a disabled child a heavy fate is in front of them. These children find themselves isolated from the community and a few people are interested in their fate. Many disabled children are admitted as retarded and all kindergartens or schools close their doors to them. It was Karla-Maria SCHÄLIKE, living in Kyrgyzstan, but a native German woman, started this Centre where mental and physically disabled children with help of adults, sign, draw, study, work and have fun as all children in the world do.

The Nadjeshda Children’s Center is a home for 60 children and teenagers, aged between 2 and 21 years. They are regarded as “worthless, discarded children”. They work with these children using therapeutic pedagogical methods, including elements of the Waldorf pedagogy and that of Janusz Korczak. The result is that with time around half of the “uneducable” are able to move into the state institutions.

Today the Center consists of:

- a new school building for the classes, 2.4.7.and 10, together with therapy rooms
- the Gerhard Bender House with various workshops rooms
- an integrative kindergarten
- the Janusz Korczak Center for Social Therapy*
- a holiday house on the Lake ISSYK KUL

The centre sees itself as a large family. With its first concern the well being of the children and those near to them

***The Janusz Korczak Center for Social Therapy**

Currently 15 severe and multiply disabled teenagers work in the Janusz Korczak Center. Three healthy teenagers help as well; all came to the Nadjeshda Center several years ago as abandoned children, with almost no experiences at school. At the moment the director of the Janusz Korczak Center is endeavoring to bring old or socially isolated people into the work of the Centre.

The Director of the Centre, Mr Igor SCHÄLIKE, told me that they try to find every month 4 000 \$ to continue this work, because there is no help for these children by the Kyrgys government.

For that reason I passed his call: Please let us know if you can contribute money or other help for the children of 'Nadjeshda'.

His e-mail address: "info ((AT)) nadjeshda.org" or <http://www.nadjeshda.org>

I was very much impressed by the approach of the Center and the warm and friendly atmosphere. We had a meeting of several hours with all the workers and volunteers in the Center. We focused on the pedagogical idea's of Janusz Korczak and the relevance of these idea's for the daily life in the Nadjeshda Center.

Before leaving Bishkek Olga OKULITCH KAZARINA and Aigul USUBALIEVA showed us the New Library for children. It is a wonderful Centre where children and youngster can loan all kinds of books and get information in the computer-center. It is a meeting-point for adults and children too; performances, lectures, seminars and many courses for youth and adults.

We were lucky to see a nice expositions of paintings and drawings, made by children.

Our visit to Kyrgyzstan remains stamped on our memory as a meeting with Korczak friends who invest in children with all their hearts.

Theo Cappon