

Brighton Lifeline Humanitarian Aid

NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2002

Welcome to our autumn newsletter!

For those of you who have never before received one, I hope you will enjoy finding out about what we do; we have incorporated some of the information from our website, to try to make this issue a useful “primer” about what we collect and how you can help.

For all our readers, there is an update on our last trip to Ukraine, and some exciting news about trips in the new year.

We are also planning one more trip this year, in late November. It is very exciting for the Brighton Lifeline team because after four years of helping us make it happen, but never actually being able to travel with us, local youth worker Giles Hippisley will be coming along. We will be travelling with Bob Chase from Bear Essential Aid in Horsham, and also Jim Browning from Kent who you may remember was the adventurer who helped me to rescue my truck from a perilous resting place in Albania, after a Kosova convoy!

The main thrust of this newsletter, however, has to be a big reminder to everybody that what we are doing to help in orphanages, schools, and impoverished families is all the more crucial now that the bitterly cold Ukrainian winter is setting in. As usual, snow didn't wait for October! Our work in building showers at schools, supplying clothes

and shoes to orphanages, and delivering medical and educational equipment, all requires your support. We greatly welcome whatever donations you can spare, and are very proud of the way in which we find ways for people to help who cannot spare money. But for those of you who *can* spare hard-earned cash, this is a plea that you consider us amongst your charitable giving.

As a small, community-based charitable organisation we count on the support of individuals and small businesses. We believe that in return, we offer the promise of a very efficient operation indeed, with no staff wages to pay and minimal overheads. Remember, it costs just £700 to get a vehicle with 2 tonnes of carefully targeted aid to its destination. But that's £700 we must raise per vehicle every single trip, and for that we really need your help.

On this very subject, I'd like to send out a big thank-you to Terry Bignall from Swanley-based *Antler Office Supplies* who has just paid for a new fuel tank for us - the pot-holed Ukrainian roads can cause serious damage to our truck! So, if you work in an office anywhere near Swanley, please help us thank them – with your business! You can reach Terry on 01322 613229.

Kieran Turner
Co-Ordinator

Seafront mural created at new “Aratta” centre

Retired Hove graphic designer Brian Kemp came on the September convoy to fulfill his promise of decorating a classroom at the new building in the “Aratta centre for children & youth” which is the focus of much of our aid delivery in Ukraine.

Aratta has instigated many of the services and facilities we would expect at a community centre, but goes far beyond that, as the group of volunteers who distribute the aid once we have come home. They look after up to 200 schools, orphanages, and foster families, as well as running a parenting group, bring-and-buy sales of home-made produce, as well as English lessons and other classes.

We were delighted when Chernigov's Deputy Mayor offered Aratta a new home in a former kindergarten for a nominal rent. At the launch party



we were able to hand over a donation which represents their rent for the next one-hundred years!

Report from August convoy by Brian Kemp & Kieran Turner

Kieran's fourth and Brian's second journey to the town of Chernigov was one of our smoothest convoys to date. (What old professionals we now feel!) The Ukrainian consulate caused some initial teething troubles by delaying the issue of a visa for Brian, so we sent the rest of the convoy ahead rather than hold up everybody. Kieran felt that he would have no trouble catching them up, since he knew the route well and had experience of convoy-catching from some of the chaotic days of 30-plus vehicles travelling to Kosova! Just to make sure we would catch up, we press-ganged another Kosova veteran, Suzi Traenkner, into helping with the non-stop drive as far as her home in Germany. In the end she found it was too much fun to stop, so came as far as Krakow in Poland! With her help we caught up on a full two days of lost time and met the four other vehicles at the Ukrainian border.

This drive gave us the opportunity to explore some new roads across Poland and see more and more evidence that Europe really is enveloping the new "candidate countries". There are Tesco stores and new petrol stations everywhere. When Poland enters the EU in 2004, Ukrainian people are very worried it will have a devastating impact on their current crucial trade with Poland and on their freedom to travel and work in other countries.

Entering Ukraine some way south of our normal route, we were enthralled by the near mediaeval village life we observed for the next day or so. Driving slowly through these villages we pass romantic wooden houses and less romantic manual water supplies – wells! – and try to forget just how awful these mud roads will be come winter. But even so, there is something enticing about life with a tiny vegetable plot, a couple of geese and a cow, which is life for many old people in these villages. Where else would you stop to help the man who has just lost a day's work because a huge unbaled mass of hay has just fallen off his horse-drawn cart? The standard transport for the collective farms remains the horse. The roads are lined with people waiting patiently to cram their buckets of apples into a friend's Lada, to head off to market.

This basic economy is the reality for many of the families we meet. It is easy to romanticise, but you can easily imagine

how hard it becomes when the family needs to buy medicine for a child whose body is ruined by the after-effects of nearby Chernobyl, or when a parent is killed by the all-too-common accidents with ancient farming or mining equipment.

We also learned this trip of a Soviet legacy which has destroyed the lives of the people of Zamglai, the village where one of our supported orphanages is based. This village exists because there was once a peat factory here. When the peat ran out, the factory was to be moved. But then the USSR collapsed, and now 3000 people flounder with no work at all. The "Aratta" community centre is discussing with us the possibility of setting up a "branch" in this village to try to find training and work opportunities for the young people there. This is given an extra edge of importance because of course there will be resentments if the orphanage becomes better equipped than the village. The sad reality of poverty.

And so to Zamglai. You can see some photos here, and if you look carefully you



might just see some clothes *you* donated! We were delighted to see that the place had been freshly painted with paint brought by another covoyer, Paul George from Canterbury. As often happens we spent most of our time playing with the kids there who think of us arriving like the circus coming to town. The director, Antonina (in the middle of the back row in the photo above) tells us that she can see the effect on the children not for days but for months after our visits – they clamour to know when the next trip will be.

The orphanage caters for around 120 girls between the ages of 4 and 24. They are not all in fact orphans, but are placed here because the parents cannot or will not look after them. Many suffer badly from a combination of the effects of the Chernobyl nuclear accident (many have thyroid cancer); from malnutrition, and from foetal alcohol syndrome, a sad problem in a country where there is little work and the depression leads to a culture of drinking home made vodka.

The older, more able girls help run

the place, where the staff are often paid only one month out of three. We try to help them to receive an education because without it, their prospects upon adulthood are very grim indeed, many ending up in state asylums for lack of any other kind of care. We can help to totally change lives!

There is hope here too. The atmosphere is excellent, with a great deal of love coming from the barely-waged staff. And as ever we were entertained by the children. For example, the girl in the white dress in the first photo, performs a dance with perfect rhythm – but we know she is deaf, and learns the songs by holding the speaker. It is this kind of enterprising and optimistic spirit we try to build on with them, doing whatever we can to engage the children with the wider world. Some of them are likely to be institutionalised for life, but even in those cases, we want to make things happier and healthier for them by supporting the institutions.

And on the subject of health, we also visited the residential school / home in the village Berezna which we've recently begun to help. The photo on the right shows the wooden



holes which serve as toilets. With donated money and plumbing materials brought by Bob and Terry, local people are now being paid to build some proper loos and showers with hot water!

The last photo shows more of the girls from Zamglai. If you would like to see more photographs from Ukraine, Kosova, or Albania, we are always adding to the gallery on our website. The address is <http://www.kosovaconvoy.com/>



The nitty-gritty: what we collect and deliver...

Educational Supplies / Computers

British teachers and parents are amazed when they find just how much equipment is disposed of here, for example, when the national curriculum changes.

The Ukrainian state tries, but struggles, to provide basics like paper & pencils. Orphanages have a particularly poor supply since they lack the parents' voices to ask for more. So we take paper, pencils, drawing boards and crayons. We also take toys and even blackboards. Very welcome are books suitable for learning English - basically all children's books.

A substantial amount of our aid is computer equipment, often surplus from local businesses or schools. We have skilled volunteers who "cannibalise" parts to ensure we take fully working systems.

Tools and Hardware

Thanks to Travis Perkins plant hire, who supply our partner Tewkesbury Independent Aid, our convoys now take tools to be used in construction projects and subsequently in community lending schemes overseen by the Arrata centre.

We always welcome fully functional tools, and are particularly seeking heating equipment (such as generators and boilers) and power generators.

Medical Equipment

We only ever work with "in-date" supplies.

Customs controls make this the hardest part of our work, but when possible we collaborate with medical professionals to re-equip health facilities in places where people who prefer clean scalpels bring their own! We are committed to improving the delivery of this kind of aid.

Tents, bedding, and clothing

We no longer actively seek second-hand clothing, because so many of our long-term supporters do us proud in this area. We are tremendously grateful to them, and to the energetic teams who knit for us! We also very much welcome *sewing machines*, which can help people provide for themselves. Most in demand of all our aid are *shoes* of all sizes.

Food

Occasionally we simply take food. This is generally bought in bulk, although we have used collections at supermarkets where passers-by each donate one item. We last did this for the refugees from Kosova, crammed into camps at the edges of Macedonia and Albania. Outside the Macedonian village of Pirok (population 1000) was a camp for 20,000 refugees. The village had to cope with hundreds of people who could not bear the camp, or were not safe there, and so we supplied the village itself whilst the major agencies ran the camp.

And what we *must* have – to make it possible

You!

Everybody who works with us is a volunteer. It can be tremendously rewarding to be part of a team which proves to real, ordinary people, that we can make a real difference in the world! You can help by talking to your friends and colleagues to raise awareness, money, and supplies. You can get involved in our theatre and music projects, working in British schools to raise awareness, or in Ukrainian orphanages to make friends and bring a little happiness to kids' lives.

And if you are able, why not start talking to friends, thinking of events, and raise some money; prepare a vehicle, and come along! We can advise and guide you, can often help you to find aid, and will introduce you to the people we work with abroad. Just one thing – we don't provide the vehicle!

£700 - £1000 per trip

Even with the generous discount we receive from *SeaFrance*, the ferry and fuel costs must be met. Add to that the need to keep our vehicles maintained in spite of appalling road surfaces and weather conditions, and you will understand that old-fashioned fundraising is a vital part of our work. Furthermore, since we aim to seriously contribute to re-development, we try to buy things like services, tools & building materials in the local economy of the target country, to promote self-reliance and autonomy for our friends and their projects.

Latest appeal: Can you help? UHF 2-way radios

Whenever new volunteers join a convoy, we must arrange communications equipment. Mobile telephones are prohibitively expensive abroad, so we always need more suitable mobile radios. British "CB" radios are sometimes used but can cause problems in other countries. We seek military or taxi-style VHF/UHF radios whenever possible.

Case study: Civil Service Motoring Association

In 2000 we received a call from the CSMA in Brighton to say they had purchased a building which had previously been a remedial school – "would we like to remove the contents?"

Naturally we jumped at the chance. That moment's kind insight by CSMA staff led to a full truck-load (over 2 tonnes) of stationery, school uniforms, sports kit, and camping gear, not to mention a selection of English dictionaries and some school furniture which went on to furnish a classroom in Prishtine, Kosova.

Please use your imagination. Do *you* know anyone whose employer disposes of surpluses?

Briefing ABOUT UKRAINE



For further information...

The BBC News website provides a particularly good archive of news and information about Chernobyl, and we recommend that to anybody with more interest – <http://news.bbc.co.uk/>
Also well worth a read is <http://www.bellona.no/> which is a Norwegian site with a great deal of information about the ex-Soviet nuclear legacy. If you don't have internet access, a well researched book all about the history and present social situation is "The Ukrainians" by Andrew Wilson and published by Yale University Press. We also welcome supporters to browse our photo library and of course ask us any queries you have!

We are sometimes asked why we choose the particular places we help. Since our current projects are in Ukraine, here is a little background on the country. Please note that we do still intend to do further work in Albania and Romania in the future.

Formerly part of the USSR, Ukraine, which lies east of Poland about 1500km from us, is now a proudly independent state, following a referendum in 1991. Although the site of many important events in history, as well as the centre of the ancient empire of the Kievan Rus, it is probably most notorious as the place where "Reactor 3" of the Chernobyl nuclear power station caught fire in 1986.

The cloud of radioactive dust has not only directly affected the health of the population, but also permanently contaminated their agricultural land. Until 2000, three reactors continued to operate at the site of the accident. Although these have now been shut down, the country has 14 other such sites and plans to build more.

At present there is insufficient power for national needs, not helped by heavy industry failing to pay its power bills. In some areas people go without power one day a week. Additionally, although the Soviet-era tower blocks in which many people live do have running water, that is often turned off at night. People living in the older, wooden housing common in villages still use wells for their water supply. Whilst this makes people very resourceful, it also has a terrible effect on quality of life and an impact on health.

The state suffers from a burden of debt to Russia, largely for gas although also for "reparations" made after the break-up of the USSR. This debt is sometimes paid using precious supplies of food, and even of electricity. The EU attempts to improve Ukraine's nuclear industry – by providing certain financial aid only in exchange for improvements to the safety of nuclear facilities in the country. The net result is that in the short term at least, there are terrible shortfalls in the budget for health and education.

In future convoys...

One of the projects we are supporting is a group of young people from Chernigov, a Ukrainian city just 50 miles from Chernobyl. For two years now they have been producing "BiT" – a newsletter about their adventures and happenings in their town. Local professionals have arranged training in skills relating to journalism including photography and computer skills. The newsletter itself was originally funded by the US Peace Corps, and is now also funded by donations from other groups, including most recently a modern Macintosh computer system for their project which we provided thanks to Ed Carr of Wivelsfield-based design company *Brand Marketing Communications*.

The same group of young people are also involved in a very exciting theatre project, which they have named "Anomaly". They are touring schools with a visual piece exploring the causes – and problems – of alcohol and drug use. [The picture above shows rehearsals.] Some of their members are also involved in a "consultative theatre" project which involves a recovered drug user portraying some of the things which shaped his life. The consultation part involves the children in the audience choosing the scenes they want to see to be able to better understand – which means the children remain in control and so maintain interest and aren't scared to watch!

In our March 2003 convoy we plan to take a group of actors and theatre professionals to run some theatre skills workshops and to take part in some circus-style fun at the orphanages. Meanwhile those same theatre people will be helping us to do some educational work here in Britain. If you are a parent or teacher, perhaps your school would like to do a project on Eastern Europe? Volunteers are available for educational talks, workshops and of course any fundraising opportunities.



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We are a non-profit Charitable Organisation staffed entirely by volunteers. We work as part of a network of small community-based humanitarian aid groups all of which are voluntary and non-political in nature. For more information about us or our recipients, and to get involved in any way, please feel welcome to get in touch.

Donations can be made in various ways. Cheques should be payable to "Brighton Lifeline" or you can deposit anonymously, to our account at the Royal Bank of Scotland, account number 10105992, sort code 16-14-24.