

Brighton Lifeline Humanitarian Aid

NEWSLETTER

Spring, 2003

Now we are five...

Welcome to the first newsletter for 2003, which sees the start of our *fifth year* delivering aid to Eastern Europe. When we began, with meetings of people desperate to do something to help the Kosovan refugee crisis, I don't think a single one of us would have predicted that we would still be going five years down the line!

Back then, we spent days debating every possible aspect of what to take, and how, and I seem to remember we even had offers of transport assistance from people with yachts!

But five years on we seem to have learnt to do it right, and although meetings of sixty people only happen when there is a crisis in the media, I'm really happy to report that the core team of volunteers with vehicles is growing.

Our first convoy of the year, in April, saw the arrival of new volunteers Peter Reilly and Andy Sordyl, who travelled from Partridge Green in Andy's fantastic Land Rover. This vehicle, part of Peter's business restoring historic buildings, had us all green with envy because of its ingenious "roof tent" which enabled him to stuff the whole cab with aid, and sleep in perfect comfort on the roof! It also rather impressed various customs officers, and I think the record for full assembly and dismantling of tent is now four minutes!

As with our November convoy, we took a large batch of sewing machines which were given to

us by Mr Watts of the *Brighton Sewing Centre* and his colleagues at the *Hastings Sewing Centre*. These machines will be used in classrooms at orphanages and also be given individually to some of the foster homes we help through the *Aratta centre for children & youth* in Chernigov, Ukraine.

In addition to the sewing machines, we took an excellent batch of twenty Pentium computers which were donated through James Watson of *Downland Housing Association* who have been very generous and promised to contact us in future whenever they are upgrading.

We rely upon your help with this, which is one of the key ways we receive our medical and educational aid – through people who put us in touch with businesses replacing equipment.

Of course, as always I need to also appeal to you all to consider a financial donation. We are proud to have managed to keep the convoy cost at £700 this year, and we remain convinced of the unique value of the special way this transports not just physical aid, but also our hopes for the future and the entertainment we can provide for the kids while we are there. But that money has to be raised every trip, and with so many of our supporters able to help in kind, rather than in cash, it's no easier now than it ever was to raise funds.

Kieran Turner
Co-Ordinator

Replacement toilets at Berezna school are progressing well

The project to rebuild the unsafe toilets at the Berezna school with modern ceramic facilities and sanitary septic tanks is now well underway.

The first two toilets have been installed in the teaching building using local materials and local workforce, who have been paid by donations secured by Bob Chase from our partner *Bear Essential Aid* in Horsham. The next stage is two more toilets there, and toilets & showers in the accommodation block. These will be western-style "sit-down" loos donated by Bath Stores in Horsham. The work will again be done by local people, injecting cash into their economy.

Berezna is a school for children with mental illnesses and learning difficulties. To give you some idea of the awful sense of poverty there, we spotted on a recent visit that the lights were only turned on for our benefit - the children had been

learning in the dark. We also witnessed an asbestos roof being dismantled with sledgehammers – not through ignorance but through lack of an alternative. There is much for us to do here!



From this wooden hut... to these new ceramic toilets, with many more to come, and at last there are septic tanks – previously the kids themselves emptied the pits with shovels.

November convoy report

by Kieran Turner with Giles Hippisley

This one will be known as “the convoy we squeezed in” – it’s normally a rule that we will not travel between November & March because of the extremes of weather we encounter which can make driving very dangerous, and sleeping in the vans almost suicidal. But in 2002 we had everything we needed for one more trip and the weather was holding, so we couldn’t resist the pull of going back to help our friends in Ukraine.

The trip comprised Kieran’s own truck from Brighton, and the “A team” of regular colleagues from around the country; a crew of old troopers who’ve done this run many times. Bob Chase, Roger Laycock and Jim Browning. Also part of our team was Giles Hippisley who helped in setting up Brighton Lifeline five years ago, and whose work commitments *finally* allowed him to come with us! The bulk of our funding came from a generous donation from the MVM Trust, which I should confess was arranged for us very very quickly by a phone call to Giles’ family lawyer, Wilf Vernor-Miles. Thanks go to him and his family’s generous legacy.

On the subject of thanks, amongst the aid were around forty sewing machines, very kindly donated by *The Brighton Sewing Centre*. Some of these have been distributed to individual foster families.

It is not uncommon for kind parents to adopt several children from the state homes, and we have met two families with as many as thirteen children! They all help to run the family vegetable plot, which almost every family maintains, often in large areas rather like our “allotments” but with the added imperative that there is no option to buy food should the crop fail! These families have to be very self-sufficient with only a tiny amount of assistance available from the state.

Some of the old Soviet-era systems of health and family care remain in place but they are chronically underfunded to the point where staff are paid as seldom as one month in three, and much medicine is available only to those who can pay. It should be stressed that many of the medical staff are very good, professional people, and put up with a great deal of hardship and personal risk, but nevertheless, the system is in every sense exhausted.

For this reason we are currently busily endeavouring to arrange for medical supplies to be got through to Ukraine, despite the many customs hurdles put in our way which include a three month delay in a bonded warehouse!

“Anomaly” theatre project take their message to the British Council!

The young people of Chernigov’s “Anomaly” theatre group recently took us down to a conference in the capital Kiev, organised by US Aid and the British Council as part of a concerted effort to inform Ukraine’s young people about the growing HIV/AIDS crisis in their country, and some of the ways they can combat this.

Anomaly have devised a series of physical theatre pieces (which translate very well to any language!) and they take them around schools, universities, and other youth organisations in the whole of Ukraine – with help from us and our friends, magician Paul George, and Peter Crosby, both from *Magic Aid* in Kent.

The productions teach about the problems of drug use, unsafe sex, and one of Ukraine’s worst enemies, alcoholism.

The conference demonstrated that there is considerable resource available from the international aid community, and that there are now young people with the energy to make this essential education

happen. It’s a constant struggle for them to convince people who have been brought up believing that nothing will change in their country, given the corrupt political situation, and lack of financial support from the state for any such initiatives.

This is one of the key ways in which *we* are about much more than just delivering consignments of physical aid. It is vitally important we continue to encourage young people like these that their ideas are viable, and that the resources they need can be found for them. Even the spirit of real people getting together and achieving something is, we hope, encouraging to them, and so the very act of taking a convoy is a help in itself.

A video of Anomaly at work is available, just ask! We can also let you see copies of the newspaper produced by their affiliated youth group, “Our Generation”. At the moment this is only in Ukrainian, but a multi-lingual version is in the pipeline.



Aratta volunteers continue mural!

You may remember reading about a mural which Hove artist Brian Kemp painted in the new buildings of the “Aratta” community centre in September. Now, the volunteers at Aratta have surpassed our dreams by carrying on the mural around

the rest of the new rooms with a fantastic eye for matching Brian’s style. One of them, a professional artist, oversaw the other helpers and some of the local children as they continued the project which is part of the renovation of the building, a former (Soviet-era) kindergarten.

The Brighton beach carousel horse has been joined by a rainbow-covered panorama of the ancient city of Chernigov, and by tiny butterflies flying around and brightening up the room. Brian is now in Florida where he has been commissioned to produce another mural, and we wish him luck in this and of course in raising the profile of our aid work in the USA!

Published & printed by *Brighton Lifeline Humanitarian Aid*, 4 Atlingworth Street, Brighton, East Sussex, BN2 1PL, UK. A map is available online at <http://www.kosovaconvoy.com/> Telephone: [UK+44] (0)1273 680414 – Email: info@kosovaconvoy.com

We are a non-profit Charitable Organisation staffed entirely by volunteers, and with no political or religious affiliation. 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.