

A little help—a big difference



Support for Kids Organization, Inc

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Dear readers and supporters,

Once again, Happy New 2011 Year!

I hope you have not noticed that I missed the January issue of our monthly newsletter.

Among some valid excuses (being a public servant/volunteer) and not so valid excuses (pre- and post Christmas parties, New Year, in addition to Georgian Christmas and Georgian New Year celebration) I guess I could have waited till yet another celebration of the official Chinese New Year and skip another month. But seriously, the main reason for not delivering the January issue, was the 'uncertainty' with what is happening with the Georgian State system for the orphanages.

Unfortunately, this *uncertainty* is still not cleared up completely, but keeping you uninformed will not solve the problem. So, in this issue I will try to deliver the latest news about what is happening in the system and our plan of action for the future. I will be very grateful if you can share your thoughts and have your input regarding the current situation that I will describe in this issue.

Let's hope that this coming Year of Rabbit will be the year for great achievements, happiness and success for all of us.

Sincerely,

Ani Mdivani-Morrow (the Rabbit)

Water System in Telavi Orphanage

The water system in Telavi orphanage we funded during my September/October trip finally got fixed. As you can see, nothing fancy, but at least the kids will have the running water and the kitchen is functioning.

Thank you San Diego Presidents Lions Club for your contribution to this project.



Reforms in Child Care System of Georgia

Even though we faced some difficulties (mostly technical) and frustrations (bureaucratic), we were able to solve the problems regardless of how hard they seemed. Our cause is greater than any of these minor problems. Based on our achievements we got too enthusiastic about our future plans. My last trip in September/October of 2010 charged me with new energy and new ideas for the kids. But new reforms in the Child Care System of Georgia made us slow down almost to a point to stopping everything and reconsider our future plan of action.

Georgia tries to adopt Western practices in almost every sphere and the Child Care System was not an exception either. The new plan of action in this direction is based on the model of foster care and also a creation of Small Group Homes (SGH) instead of large institutions for abandoned children.

The foster care proved to be a failure in most cases around the world and based on some recent economic data, Georgia is not ready to adopt this practice. The majority of population is economically stagnant - low GDP per capita (\$4,800 in 2010) , 18% unemployment and 32% of population below poverty level.

The current situation looks like the following:

17 big orphanages providing care to up to 800 children of 6 to 18 years old are still temporarily under the control of the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia (MoLHSA) but their number is going to increase by 175 because according to the agenda of the reforms implemented by the other government agency (Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia) several boarding schools subordinated to this ministry will be closed this year. Thus, the estimated number of children in this age group in the Child Care Institutions under the MoLHSA will amount to 975 .

The assessment performed in 2010 shows that 30 to 35% of the beneficiaries can be reintegrated into their biological families and additional 8 to 10% can be adopted or placed in foster care. Therefore, to ensure a full transfer of all the remaining beneficiaries of the orphanages (about 600) into SGHs it will be necessary to open 72 additional homes of this type, with each of them accommodating at most 8 beneficiaries according to the recent standards in force.

These homes, according to the document issued by Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, will be built or purchased by the state or donors and will remain under public ownership . The management functions of these SGH will be given to private entities selected on a competitive basis. The state will purchase these services from (for profit or non-for-profit) organizations which will assume responsibility (including financial) for the proper management of several SGHs .

Even though that majority of the Georgia's State orphanages were in terrible shape, and significant funds were needed for their remodeling and operation, I still think that it was more doable, more manageable and more cost effective. What is happening now, is that basically the State frees itself (at least partially) from a financial burden and asks us, non profits and other NGOs [non government organizations] to take care of these kids.

In the case of foster care, Support For Kids Organization Inc can not participate or monitor the well-being of the kids. It is a responsibility yet another agency, but what we can do, is to ask for independent evaluation of the living conditions and how the kids have been treated in such foster families.

Reforms in Child Care System of Georgia

The second part of the plan might look good, but it is very cost consuming . *continued from page 2*

For example, based on the proposed plan, Support For Kids Organization, Inc can buy a house (or houses) in certain regions of the country that could accommodate 8 kids (I assume there will be a certain criteria required to satisfy the standards). All the expenses associated with the maintenance (electricity, water, heat, etc), living conditions (furnishing), food, clothing and salaries for the teachers and a supervisor (it has to be one adult living with the kids), become a financial responsibility of Support For Kids Organization Inc. on top of other maybe even more serious responsibilities. It will be a private orphanage. The government will pay 12-15 lari per kid per day (which is equivalent of \$7-9) for the service we provide to the kids. This amount might cover the basic necessities, but I doubt it will improve the conditions the kids are right now. We can not rely only on you – the generosity of our donors. We have to have enough resources to be able not only provide shelter and feed these kids, but to make their life is better; wasn't that a whole point behind our organization? Now it is getting more difficult by the minute, but it does not mean that I want to bail out from this project. I am not going to give up so easily; I made a promise to these kids and I will do whatever is in my power to keep this promise (I just don't quite know how yet).

In the same document about this reform is mentioned that a special approach should be developed for children under state guardianship to support their independent living after they become adults. On average 50 children under state guardianship turn 18 during a year. It is important to plan and develop services that provide these kids with vocational training, temporary housing and sufficient means of support. It is desirable to ensure a wide participation and employment of the resources of the private sector in addressing this issue (e.g. running on-the-job training programs under which persons under state guardianship will be temporarily employed by private companies and develop vocational skills and abilities provided that their salaries are partially or fully financed by the state).

If we can incorporate these 2 ideas - a private orphanage with potential of vocational training program for the kids in the age group 14-18, it actually might work. In the previous newsletters, I have mentioned repeatedly the problem with overage kids (when they reach age of 18 they have to leave the orphanage, they have no place to go and they are not prepared for independent life). If we can sustain the operation of our private orphanage and at the same time involve these kids (in this age group) in the various businesses to learn and get trained, they can learn skills and be ready for the independent life by the time they reach age of 18.

I hope I explained what is happening and why we are a bit puzzled how to handle these new challenges.

Right now we are doing some research regarding the locations, some legal issues and finance. If we go ahead with this project, we would like to focus on the regions that can be relatively easy to manage, that can provide agricultural, industrial or service related vocational training for the kids; have some basic infrastructure like schools ((roads would be nice as well) and be included in the list of regions provided by MoLHSA. The legal issues (for example ownership, limitations, etc) need to be clear to avoid any complications in the future. The biggest challenge will be to find financing for this venture which is not easy in current economic climate. Georgia has a huge potential for development and if we can integrate into this process our main objective - the support and the well being for the kids, it will be our biggest achievement where you can be a major part and a driving force. I will be very grateful if you can share your thoughts and have your input in this decision making process.



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DIFFERENCE

Your tax-deductable financial gift is the most important action you can take to help this great cause. Please visit our site www.supportforkids.org/donation/page

Please help

Georgia up-close : Christmas Celebration in Georgia

As in other Eastern Orthodox countries, Christmas in Georgia is celebrated on January 7. This is a result of Eastern Orthodox churches marking Christmas Day based on the Julian calendar, which is now 13 days behind the internationally used Gregorian calendar. Unlike its Western counterparts, Christmas is mainly a religious event and devoted Georgians fast for 40 days leading up to Christmas refraining for consumption of meat and dairy products (fish is allowed only on certain days). Traditional Georgian carols use the words "on 25th December Christ was born in Bethlehem".

The Georgian version of the Christmas tree, (*Chichilaki*) is made of soft wooden material with curled branches. Sometimes it is hazelnut branch which is carved into a Tree of Life-like shape and decorated with fruits and sweets. The Western custom of a Christmas tree is also popular.

The Georgian equivalent of "Santa Claus" is known as *tovlis papa* (or *tovlis babua*), literally meaning a "Grandfather snow". He is traditionally portrayed with long white bearded, dressed in national costume and wearing a fur cloak.

Another interesting thing is that Santa Claus does not visit the Georgian children on Christmas, but rather on New Year's Eve.

When we are talking about Georgia and any Georgian Celebration, we cannot avoid one of the main components - a traditional Georgian feast. Georgian cuisine deserves a devotion of a multivolume publication and I can not possibly describe it in this small space. I promise to give you some basic information in my next issue but for now, I will just mention only one main treat of Georgian Christmas - *churchkhela*. It is as hard to pronounce as to make it. There are some slight variations in making process between Western and Eastern Georgia, but basically *churchkhela* is made of walnuts, hazel nuts or almonds sewn onto a string, dipped in thickened white grape juice and dried in the shape of a sausage.

It is my favorite Georgian treat and as much as I love to share everything with my friends, this is the exception. If I ever did let you try it, it means that you are very special and I love you very much.



While I was preparing materials for this issue, I discovered one Georgian tradition I was not familiar with. It is called *Alilo* (from Alleluia) and it is a Georgian psalm performed on the Christmas eve. Apparently it was established centuries ago but have been forgotten in the 20th century due to communism regime. A few years ago this tradition was revived by the initiative of Catholicos-Patriarch of Georgia Ilya II. This tradition is of a charitable character for the vulnerable people.

In this photo kids are dressed in special clothing (they look like little crusaders), marching in the streets collecting sweets from the adults.