

The BEARR Trust Annual Lecture 2006

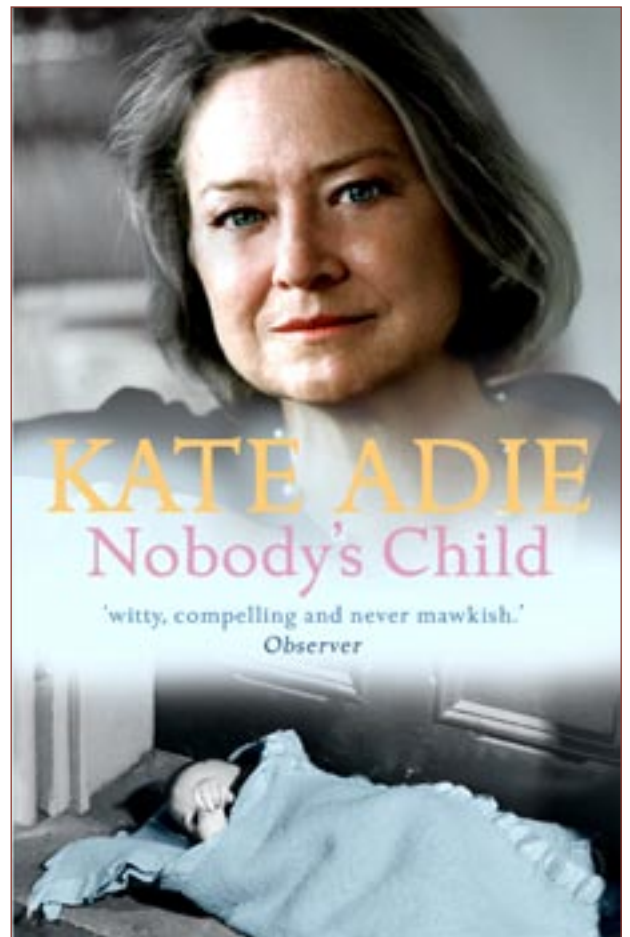
Foundlings in Russia

Kate Adie, noted journalist, war correspondent and author of 'Nobody's Child', gave The BEARR Trust Annual Lecture on 26 June at the Foundling Museum in London. Nicola Ramsden, BEARR Trustee, reports.

Kate Adie delivered her lecture with passion, and with withering contempt for the deficiencies of both the Russian and British systems of dealing with abandoned children. No longer camouflaged in khaki, face taut and wary as she reported nearby conflict, here was a sleekly-groomed Adie hurling the grenades herself, with a luminously wicked grin. Fiery and iconoclastic, she launched missiles at church and state alike, demanding a change of policy at the top and a rooting out of murky Slavic folklore from the depths of Russian social consciousness.

Adie's subject, Foundlings in Russia, is very close to BEARR's principal concern with health and social welfare. As Chairman Michael McCulloch pointed out in his introduction, the number of destitute children is growing but policies often conflict. Several of the 100 or so guests in the audience had first-hand experience of working with Russian state orphanages and with the growing numbers of children who live on the streets and in railway stations in Russian cities. And the venue for the lecture, the Picture Gallery of London's Foundling Museum, reminded us that what Adie referred to as 'Europe's greatest social problem' a few hundred years ago has been addressed over the years with varying degrees of resource and imagination by royalty, 'decent citizens', and the state, but has not been solved yet.

Russia holds the undistinguished record of having more abandoned children in state institutions – one million – than any other country. Adie's complaint was not so much



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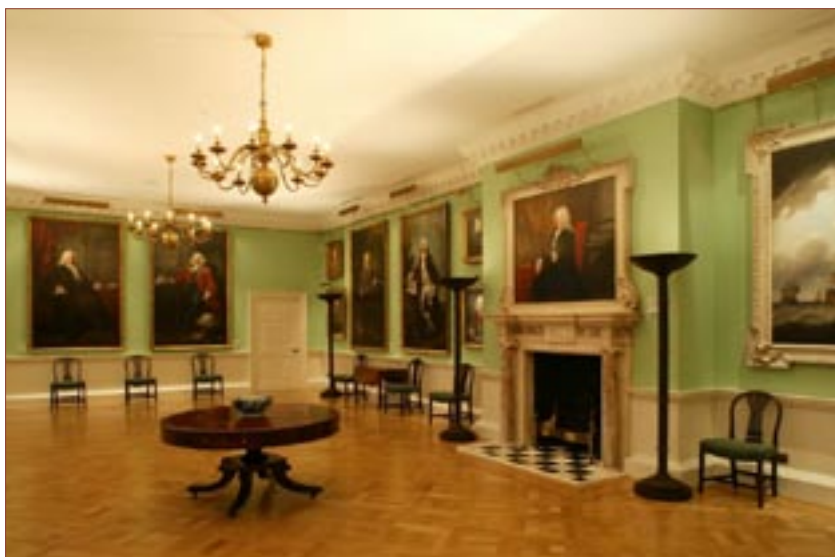
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about the treatment of children in orphanages as that they are there in the first place. This is of course to look at the issue from the perspective of social and policy changes over the last half-century in the UK. Here, the number of children abandoned or given up at birth has fallen with contraception and the changing status of women, and orphanages have given way to fostering in families.

Ironically, the continuing tradition of institutionalisation that Adie finds repugnant in Russia began at a time when the emerging city-states of Europe felt compelled to deal with the thousands of children abandoned by women who had unacceptably conceived outside the church-enforced marriage structure. Wealthy citizens competed to fund splendid buildings to house the children, beautifying their city and tidying up a social blight at the same time. From 14th century Dubrovnik, through to Brunelleschi's magnificent 16th century Innocenti in Florence, concern about abandoned children found its expression in bricks and mortar – and a sense that the children must be grateful and work hard to expiate their mothers' guilt.

Russia was no exception. Orphanages in Moscow and St Petersburg enjoyed royal patronage, notably from Catherine the Great, and the upper classes were encouraged to take an interest and to give money. The serf system ensured a plentiful supply of poor people willing to work in the orphanages in exchange for no more than bed and board.

But why have other countries moved on, emphasising care in families rather than institutionalisation, while Russia has not? Adie now moved into top gear. There are a million children in state institutions in Russia because a lingering undercurrent of Slavic folklore and church-reinforced superstition has been bolstered by 20th century Communist policies and the disgraceful pseudo-science of 'Defectology', which still persists in the permanent classification of children as 'idiots' or 'imbeciles' by the age of four.



The Picture Gallery where the lecture took place

Adie was hilarious on the subject of the church's efforts to enforce marriage; originally reflecting the need to control inheritance, but developing into elaborate rules of conduct which restricted sex to the four days a month that were not holy days or saints' days. But there was a dark side to this. In a world of ignorance, a child born with a defect could be explained as a child who had been sinfully conceived on a forbidden day. Even older superstitions and the fictional traditions surrounding foundlings recalled the idea of an imperfect child as the devil's child. These folk beliefs, Adie argued, still lurk unspoken in the background and explain the readiness of parents to give up a less-than-perfect child to be hidden away by the state.

Communist policy reinforced social and family pressure to give up disabled children. As Adie reminded us, the idea of Mother Russia taking you under her wing is part of the landscape of Russian society. Under Communist rule, the role of the state in people's lives intensified. The better nutrition, care and way of life offered by the new system were expected to produce perfect children. Imperfect children were better given up to a state that knew better. But the 'Defectology' classifications given to such children at an early age form a permanent part of the paperwork that defines them, ensuring their continued institutionalisation and denying them any possibility of employment as adults.

Adie had a few things to say in mitigation of this 'alliance of rubbish science with old superstition'. Workers in the baby houses and orphanages are often kind and loving, despite their low incomes and deep-rooted beliefs that the children in their care have no potential. And there is now more awareness, and discussion about the system – although understandably there is a low tolerance of foreign-based charities and initiatives. And while Adie called the continued practice of 'Defectology' a disgrace to the Russian nation, she also thought it 'an absolute bloody disgrace' that Britain still has on its statute book the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act, under which mothers who abandon children are prosecuted rather than helped.

In conclusion, Adie insisted that the Russian system must change from the top. But de-institutionalisation in Russia implies picking away at the very fabric of the state. There is only one way this can be done: softly, softly ...

The BEARR Trust is grateful to Kate Adie for giving the lecture and for signing copies of her book afterwards; and to the Foundling Museum for hosting the lecture and reception, and opening the Museum before the lecture so that guests could visit their fascinating museum and splendid premises.

New BEARR website launched

www.bearr.org



The BEARR Trust's new website, launched on 15 August, has been designed in direct response to Friends and other supporters who, as we reported in the last Newsletter, urged BEARR to play a more active networking role for NGOs working in health and social welfare in our region (formerly FSU or CIS, but now designated Russia and Eurasia).

The site provides, among other things:

- information about BEARR's own activities, including conferences, lectures and other events – past, present and future; the Small Grant Scheme; an archive of Newsletters; how to support BEARR; and a system of on-line application, renewal and payment for Friends;
- databases of NGOs and other organisations and professionals engaged in our sectors, in all our countries; of information, including articles about the political and bureaucratic environment in which we work, recent developments in the third sector or in health and social policy, and other material of interest to our supporters; and of useful resources: publications, research reports, project reports, videos etc. All of these are searchable by country or by sector, or through a sophisticated search engine;
- other facilities of general interest to our region and sectors, including a database of funding organisations, calendar of events, and image gallery;
- Noticeboard: an interactive facility where you can find staff, volunteers or experts, offer your services, ask and

answer specific questions, or have a general discussion on any topic of common interest;

- A rolling news column including regular bulletins of NGO news from the Agency for Social Information in Moscow; and a selection (updated hourly) of news of NGOs and our sectors from Googlenews (with apologies for the occasional eccentricities of Google's selection).

Current topics on the Noticeboard include the situation of NGOs in Russia following recent legislation, and homelessness – also the theme of our Annual Conference in November. The most up-to-date information on the Conference and other events will always be found on the website.

Almost all the site is open to public view. It is intended to be a site to which all can contribute and from which all can gain. But those who register as Members (which is free) will additionally be able to contribute to the Noticeboard, and input directly their own organisation details, calendar events and images.

The site is in its infancy and needs a hard core of supporters and contributors if it is to fulfil its purpose. Please register as a Member now at www.bearr.org, and urge all your contacts in the sector to do likewise.

Comments and suggestions are always welcome: please contact webmaster@bearr.org

KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

Civil Society and NGOs in the Kyrgyz Republic

by *Elena Voronina,*
PR coordinator,
Centre Interbilim Bishkek

During its first years of independence, Kyrgyzstan was recognized by the world community as an 'island of democracy and freedom of speech' in Central Asia.

The rolling back of democracy and backtracking on state guarantees of civil rights and freedoms began in 1993 when the first parliament was dismissed. Over the last 14 years, President Akaev has imposed his authoritarian regime, suppressing constitutional democracy and basic human rights and freedoms, and violating the independence of the courts.

After the US and Russia established bases in Kyrgyzstan in 2001 and 2003, Akaev felt free to flout the Constitution, suppress demonstrations, gaoil his chief rival, distort the electoral process, and put pressure on business. Finally changes to the Constitution endorsed in a referendum enabled the president to extend his period in office.

Meanwhile, economic recession and the collapse

of authorities to enrich themselves and corruption to flourish at all levels of the state, especially the top.

As the process began to extend the president's term of office, the opposition began to look for a way out of the crisis. The first step was the formation of a coalition of all democratic forces in early 2005. At the same time NGOs started to work with opposition politicians and independent journalists to react immediately to anti-constitutional actions by the president and government. 'Interbilim' was set up to track developments in civil society, enhance the role and influence of NGOs, stabilize the situation in the country, and promote the principles of democracy. NGOs campaigned against the banning of would-be election candidates, the persecution of opposition journalists, the closure of independent radio, and official control over internet space. They disseminated news by email, delivered independent media to homes, and kept the outside world informed of what was going on.

The elections of February and March 2005 – marred by corruption, bias and coercion – and their aftermath finally snapped the people's patience. Faced with the mismanagement of social policy, the catastrophic economic situation, and the endemic corruption, a mass rally for civil society hosted by Interbilim took place on 23 March: it was violently broken up. There followed the people's revolution of 24 March and the rapid departure from Bishkek of President Akaev. This was a turning-point in Kyrgyz history, an opportunity for a fresh start.

It began well. NGOs initiated and participated actively in planning changes, including a constitutional reform on democratic principles, limiting the powers of the president and creating a presidential-parliamentary system. The election of the second president of Kyrgyzstan in the summer of 2005 was recognized by international observers as the most democratic election of the post-Soviet

era. People looked to the future with new hope.

These hopes were short-lived. Negative aspects continued, including corruption, criminal influence at all levels, forced redistribution of ownership and seizure of national assets. The powers of the president, far from being limited, were extended. As a result, investment fell, and faith in the new authorities and in a better future faded.



Peaceful civil society demonstration in Bishkek

of strategic branches of industry led to the growth of unemployment and high external debt, and limited the population's access to social services, education and health care, while reducing their social welfare. The acquisition of profitable state and private enterprises, including telecommunications and the mass media, allowed the

BELARUS HOSPICES

Civil society has however kept up the pressure since then, and worked to keep its agenda of democracy and human rights in front of the authorities. During the first days after the revolution a group of NGOs established a Coordination Crisis Council of Civil Society to promote the regulation of the post-revolutionary situation. In particular, NGOs were at the forefront of the process of impeachment – a public protest against negotiating with a president who had fled the country.

NGOs, together with the business sector, deputies, political parties and public policy specialists have raised issues of public security and appointments policy, the format for the Constitutional Council and terms for its resumption of work, and also the ‘information war’ and ‘slander war’. The new government has invited NGO leaders onto commissions and working groups. If this continues, matters can be moved forward.

Today civil society has one more chance to affect Kyrgyzstan’s future. To be precise, we need from the beginning to track and evaluate every step by our government, parliament and administration, taking an active part and participating with equal rights in all phases of the planning,

implementation and evaluation of programmes and budgets. We should be involved in the process of political, economic and social decision-making, and influence those from whom these decisions originate.

As the people continue to resist the leadership’s authoritarian tendencies, we have a second chance to build a real democratic society and become a positive example for the rest of Central Asia.

Part 2 of this article, focusing more closely on NGOs in our sectors, will appear in the next issue of the Newsletter and on the website www.bearr.org.

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Friends Network in UK supports Belarus’s Hospice Movement

by Daryl Hardman

Since its inception in 1994, the Belarusian Children’s Hospice (BCH) has been an innovator in almost every way possible. It was the FIRST children’s hospice in the whole of the former Soviet Union and to this day carries the flag of leader and engine house of the hospice movement within Belarus, where it has spun off three more small children’s hospices and Belarus’s first mobile hospice for adults, based in Minsk. In 2005 the director of the Hospice was a keynote speaker at the BEARR Conference, since when, with UK support, her Hospice has built a new family respite care centre on a site just outside Minsk.

The Belarusian Children’s Hospice and its smaller satellites rely for the majority of their funding on western help, some through the European Union’s TACIS programme, much of the rest from small organisations and individuals in the UK. Innovatory as always, the BCH has taken the first step towards indigenous funding by appointing one of its administrative staff to search for local sponsors within Belarus itself. The job promises to be a long one, although some successes are already being scored: the Minsk authorities for example have taken over the adult hospice and some local companies are donating goods to the children’s hospice.



Hospice doctor with mother and baby

To mark the twentieth anniversary of Chernobyl, in 2006, the BCH has set up Friends of the Belarusian Children’s Hospice (UK), which is currently undergoing registration as a charity in England and Wales and also in Belarus. Friends has

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New NGO law in Russia: update

In Newsletter No 46 Victoria Webb of Amnesty International reported on the law passed in January 2006. This update reviews the subsequent implementing regulations.

Prime Minister Fradkov issued the first set of secondary legislation, or implementing regulations, on 15 April. These set out in more detail the reporting requirements for civil society organisations.

President Putin has said the new law is intended to bring order rather than restrictions into the activities of NGOs. Foreign Minister Lavrov told critics in January that much depended on the law's implementation; the regulations should set out a framework for the relevant executive agencies. Unfortunately, the regulations published in April, rather than allaying fears, set out burdensome reporting requirements and failed to clarify the new powers afforded to officials. The main criticisms of the new law and its implementing regulations are that they

- give the authorities excessive powers of supervision of the funding and activities of Russian, foreign and international NGOs
- are unduly burdensome, diverting resources from substantive programmes
- use a regulatory framework that can be arbitrarily applied
- have key provisions which lack a precise legal definition, giving an unacceptable degree of discretion to the authorities
- can impose sanctions that are disproportionate
- could be discriminatory in imposing even stricter control on foreign NGOs.

The extra requirements for reporting to the Federal Registration Service (FRS) on core work are far more burdensome than previously, and the requirement to report to the FRS on project work is entirely new. To cope with the new paperwork, NGOs are having to divert resources from their valuable core activities. These requirements are over and above those imposed on other institutions, eg firms. They appear to bear little relation to the pursuit of a legitimate aim such as combating money laundering, which is already covered in other laws.

The vague definitions create difficulties in terms of reporting past work and also, for representative or branch offices of foreign and international NGOs, reporting on planned work. They also make possible arbitrary actions by officials. For example, all representative and branch offices of foreign and international organisations are required every October to submit a plan of programmes for the following year – but 'programme', 'project' and even 'event' are not defined, so that any kind of activity (even an interview) could be classified as an 'event'.

The law and those implementing regulations so far published also fail to limit and define the power of the authorities to supervise the work of NGOs. For example, they do not set out clear criteria for the exercise of the power of the executive to request documents and to send representatives to attend meetings organised by an NGO. This power should be limited to situations where there are serious grounds for suspecting that legislation is being violated. The regulations also fail to clarify when the authorities can ban an entire project or even part of a project, or block financing of organisations or private individuals. This results, at best, in a lack of clarity for NGOs attempting to comply with the new law; at worst, it will result in arbitrary actions by the executive.

The implementing regulations do not clarify the grounds on which registration can be refused. For example, the law says vaguely that the authorities can deny registration to a civil society organisation if its name 'offends public decency or ethnic and religious feelings'. There are no such limitations for commercial entities.

It is not clear that administrative decisions taken under the law can be effectively challenged through the courts. More precision is needed to enable court challenges to be brought. Also the role of the courts set out by the new law must be strengthened. As the law stands, decisions to grant registration of an NGO must be taken within 30 days, and a refusal can be appealed in court. The law should be amended so that, should there be no decision, the authority is presumed to have granted registration, or the court can compel a decision to be taken.

In July President Putin gave assurances that NGOs, foreign as well as Russian, would not be hindered from carrying out their legitimate activities. He also made a public commitment to review implementation and the implementing regulations, while rejecting the call to amend the federal law. This review must be undertaken as soon as possible to ensure the worst aspects of the law are not realised. It should involve independent experts, with legal knowledge and experience in the area of NGO regulation in Russia as well as the wide civil society community, and be empowered to make authoritative recommendations to amend the federal law and its implementing regulations.

CONTACT DETAILS

Amnesty International
www.amnesty.org

The latest developments in NGO regulation and registration will be discussed at the seminar reported on page 13

The Oxford-Perm Link: a history

In 1985, when Perm was still a closed city, Karen Hewitt, a tutor in Literature at Oxford University, invited three Russians attending a British Council course to tea. An English teacher from Perm talked enthusiastically about his city in the Urals, and Karen, horrified at the notion of a closed city, asked for the address of an English Literature specialist at Perm State University (PSU). She was lucky: soon she was writing to Boris Proskurnin; and for three years they exchanged long, excited letters about their lives and literature.

In 1988 Mr Gorbachev decreed that Perm was now open to the world. Karen decided to see this secret city for herself. With considerable difficulty but supported by PSU, she obtained a visa to teach at the university. (A month after her return she met the Russian Consul, who, deeply shocked, asked: 'How the hell did you get to Perm?')

During Karen's month in Perm in April–May 1989, she taught at the university, spoke to hundreds of people, witnessed elections to the first (and last) Soviet Congress of People's Deputies, visited villages and dachas, large flats and communal flats, beautiful parks and grim suburbs. She took part in demonstrations,

school visits, and long complicated meetings with bewildered Communist Party officials. The Rector of PSU, V.V. Malanin, aware of how intellectually isolated Perm was, asked if she could establish a link with Oxford University. At that time the USSR was the most exciting country in the world for outside observers, so it was not difficult to persuade Oxford to set up a link between the two universities. Soon there were academic visits; the first of the annual groups of Perm teachers arrived in Oxford; the first Oxford aspirant went to Perm (to study the Perm mafia).

Meanwhile, a group of Oxford citizens were discussing twinning Oxford with 'somewhere in Eastern Europe' following its opening to the west. Perm was an obvious choice: soon they were invited by the Perm Society of Disabled People. In November 1990, Liz Brighthouse, Director of Oxfordshire Council for Voluntary Action, and Deb Manley, a tireless enthusiast for practical-social-cultural links, went to Perm to discuss the role of voluntary organisations with city and regional officials. Back in Oxford they learnt how to raise money for their schemes: the Foreign Office, EU grants section and many

Karen Hewitt, with contributions from Deb Manley

charitable trusts became very familiar with applications from Oxford for 'joint activities with Perm'.

In 1991 the first group from Perm voluntary and local organisations came to Oxford. It included the chairman of the Society for Disabled People, Stanislav Pastakov, one of the most remarkable people we had ever met; the Vice Chairman of the Regional Council; the chief officers of the Red Cross and Deaf Society; the Mayor of Kungur; an Orthodox priest and an interpreter.

The civil activities programme grew and grew. Oxford professionals went to Perm to talk about their work. Perm enthusiasts came to Oxford to observe both voluntary work and the health and social service provision in Oxfordshire. Perm set up its first nursery school for disabled children. A Perm police officer came to look at community policing; a Thames Valley chief superintendent and a probation officer went to Perm to examine their work with young offenders and drug addicts. One of the most active links was (and is) between Sobell House, the Oxford hospice, and the Perm hospice movement.

In 1995 and 1996, a programme funded by the Foreign Office called 'Democracy in Action' enabled representatives of local government, voluntary associations, the media, the universities and the legal professions from both sides to meet in Perm and discuss – over three days – how ordinary people can be involved in the daily governance of their lives. What does real democracy mean? What does 'civil society' mean? We debated at length and organised new exchanges.

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Shoes collected for homeless children in Perm by friends in Oxford.

Partnership – an arranged marriage? Ups and downs in Perm

Partnership with NGOs has become something of a mantra in Russian local government.

But what does it mean in practice? Partnership is perhaps akin to an arranged marriage: where the parties are consenting and they share a cultural context and expectations, it can be very successful, but where the partners differ in their outlook and motivation, it can lead to misunderstandings, acrimony and divorce.

Take the example of the Perm Education Department (DOE) and the Perm Autistic Society (PAS). In 2004 PAS, mainly a group of concerned parents, supported (with resources, teacher training and parent seminars) the opening of a special department for autistic children in a Perm special school. Partnership with PAS, with which it was barely acquainted, began as another 'tick in the box' for the DOE. Within 10 days of their brief introduction and without any consultation, the Department presented PAS with a signed partnership plan. In the interests of building trust and fostering relations, PAS decided not to wrangle, but rather to begin work with its new partner.

As long as PAS agreed with the DOE, all was well. However, cracks in the relationship quickly developed when PAS began to challenge its partner. The role of advocacy is fundamental to many if not all NGOs. In no other role is the independent autonomy of an NGO more

prominent. In the West, actively representing and making a stand for legal rights is routine. By contrast, in Russia, where paternalistic relations characterise any partnership between State and NGO, advocacy is often taken as effrontery and those who play the role are seen as potential usurpers of power.

In summer 2005 the DOE decided to close the school, allegedly for financial reasons. PAS was not consulted, or informed until August, nor were the teachers informed. In this the DOE acted illegally, and PAS was able, with help from the Chamber of Civil Law (another NGO) and the ombudsman, and following intervention from Moscow, to get the decision reversed. One quirk of this process was that the DOE, required to

Esther Maria Pallot
Former director and founder member of Perm Autistic Society
Special needs advisor (education)

consult an NGO about closure, asked the Russian Disabled Society (a state-supported NGO) to agree to it. Thanks to a chance meeting, where all the facts were laid bear, the society refused, having had no role in the school hitherto.

The word 'partnership' can now be found in almost every policy document involving people working together, within and across sections of Russian society. But just how universally understood is the concept? Since perestroika much know-how has been transmitted from the West to Russia's growing third sector. The notable increase in the number of NGOs would suggest a change in thinking amongst ordinary citizens about power and who wields it. However, while the historical stereotype of the powerless



Boys at Zhdanov Regional Special School in Perm, left to right: Misha, Sasha (who is not autistic but non-verbal: nobody would educate him so we took him under our wing), Denis, Pasha, Sasha, Stepan.

Photo: Ekaterina Slagina of PAS

FOCUS ON PERM

citizen is gradually undergoing revision, its counterpart, the State, is enduring a painful crisis of identity.

In Soviet times, power resided with government 'chinovniki', or petty bureaucrats. Many of the same people remain in positions of authority today. Now, however, they are expected to 'marry outside the party' and 'play at happy families'. The challenge of overcoming such a massive, inherent and historical imbalance of power is at times underestimated by the West. Can real partnership with any depth of commitment be achieved? The third sector in Russia has been asking itself this very question regularly for a number of years particularly in the absence of pro-third sector legislation.

PAS are certainly less romantic about the concept of real partnership after the trauma of summer 2005. In their opinion, any depth of commitment is dependent on a 'whim' or 'panic' on the part of 'chinovniki' and incredible persistence on the part of the NGO. The choice to 'hang in there' and 'work hard at it' is a tough one and many NGOs, particularly those run by volunteers, do not have the human, never mind emotional, resources to do it. Many Russian NGOs understand the principles of working together and have the necessary qualities to be a good 'match'. As in all successful marriages, there is a need to 'work at it'. Unfortunately at the moment,

and indeed for the foreseeable future, expectations for partnership would seem to differ significantly between the State and the third sector. There is an urgent need for many to remove their rose-tinted spectacles where partnership is concerned for, quite apart from its practical implications, deep commitment is near impossible without a common vision.

In the words of Saint Exupery, 'Love does not consist in gazing at each other but in looking outward together in the same direction'.

CONTACT DETAILS

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Oxford-Perm link *continued from page 7*

A new course in social work was developed at PSU by Ruskin College, Oxford, while Perm Pedagogical University worked with the Education Department at Oxford University on special training for teachers of disabled children. Politics specialists from the two universities jointly wrote a book about 'good government'.

Perm Region is twinned with Oxfordshire, and Oxford city with Perm city. Theatre and dance groups, environmental research groups and local government 'shadow schemes' have been some of the outcomes. But although celebrations and ceremonies have played their part, what has kept the twinning alive is the fact that it involves so many institutions and so many focused, practical schemes. Out of these schemes have come hundreds of friendships which feed back again into new schemes for the joint enrichment of our two cities and their surrounding regions.

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Oxford-Perm hospice link

The hospice link is one of the oldest of the Oxford-Perm contacts. In March 2004 two Oxford specialists, Rosalyn Roulston and Kathy Warburton, went to Perm for the latest stage in their cooperation, a seminar for hospice and similar staff. As well as sessions on basic counselling skills, theoretical perspectives on loss and bereavement, risk assessment and working with children, the Perm organisers requested sessions on personal and professional support. Thanks to the visitors' Russian, they were able to work in-depth and cover sensitive issues such as suicide and depression. In addition, and most importantly, the visitors were asked to 'train the Russian trainers', in line with the wishes of the two sponsoring organisations, the Victor Zorza Hospice Trust and 'Help the Hospices'.

The seminar participants tackled the skills work and other exercises (role plays, sharing experiences, creative activities etc) with great enthusiasm. They enjoyed working in new ways, particularly working creatively with children. For the visitors, the Russians' resilience, courage and dedication to their work (often in very difficult circumstances) made the seminar a privilege and a life-changing experience.

Thanks to such professional links, the Perm Hospice and Cancer Information Centre have become 'Centres of Excellence' for Palliative Care in the region in spite of the poverty of their buildings and resources.



A nurse in the ill-provided medical store at Perm Hospice

Photo: Kathy Warburton

Volunteering: a British voice

I volunteer full-time as a project manager for Love's Bridge – a small, non-religious charity dedicated to enabling Perm's underprivileged and street youth to avoid a life of homelessness, poverty, addiction and crime. We have had limited success with local volunteers, and one of our major goals for this year is to recruit more Perm students – it is very important for the young people we work with to have good role models of a similar age to interact with. We also encourage our kids to volunteer with other local organisations, to show them that they can do something positive, make a difference and have fun at the same time.

There are others seeking to encourage volunteering, notably the youth wings of 'Memorial' and Khodorkovsky's 'Open Russia'. Open Russia ran a 'Festival of Volunteering' attended by over 150 students. There was much enthusiasm at the time, but so far disappointingly few actual volunteers. Typically, they like the idea of helping others, but don't understand that participation is the key to transforming an idea into reality.

It's very often the same small group who volunteer for a variety of organisations. From one point of view it's great that these volunteers are united and ready to support each other, but it would be even better to see a wide range of people contributing different skills, instead of a handful being stretched beyond their abilities.

One form of volunteering, the annual subbotnik, is still tinged with Soviet 'duty' rather than a real wish to improve the city. Also, it doesn't confront the source of the problem. We cajoled a group of our children into

giving the nearby street a good clean – but within a week there was litter everywhere! The kids complained it had been a waste of time, and it was difficult to argue with them.

This incident highlighted two things for me. In general, people love to complain, but act with complete indifference when asked to do anything. Secondly, the only way to get such people to help others is to make it materially beneficial to them. Businesses are similarly inclined. We appealed to local firms to support our drive to renovate our shelter. But they want to get something in return, so instead prefer to give toys to a children's home and invite the local



Lena sewing a doll with the aid of our social worker, Vera. The dolls are sold in the UK and USA to help raise awareness and a bit of money, with the children getting some pocket money for successful work. Photo: Hamish Heald

press. We have had a few generous offers of help, but more often get half-hearted excuses.

We have found it hard to make any breakthrough with the average 'Permyak'. Yes, they realise there are huge problems with Russia's underprivileged youth, that much needs to be done to give them hope and that someone has to do it; but they don't want to be responsible for anything.

So, Russia today is a country facing massive social problems, with no system in place to deal with them.

Hamish Heald

Recent graduate in Russian from Leeds University

Indeed, the system itself, based on privileges and not rights, causes many of the problems. The neediest are left to fend for themselves, or to try and scramble over each other to escape poverty, like lobsters trying to get out of a bucket.

This 'every man for himself' mentality is endemic in society, and stems from the attitudes of the political and business elites. If the average Russian is to take more responsibility and contribute positively to society, they need role models at the very top – to show that a society grows and succeeds by helping one another. The UK and other countries have nationwide programmes to encourage volunteering, while Mr Putin seems intent on impeding the growth of the third sector. It's easy to see why Russia is facing a demographic crisis.

Volunteering at Love's Bridge, I get to see the people who suffer most from current attitudes – children left to fend for themselves by uncaring parents and an uninterested society. It is very hard to convince these children that they can succeed, because all they can see around them is failure. By showing them that there are people willing to help them, and that they are able to help others, we can prove to them that they are capable of succeeding. Unfortunately this process will continue to be long and difficult as long as society keeps telling them otherwise.

CONTACT DETAILS

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... and some Russian voices

‘A few years ago I began to feel that there was something missing in my life. I wanted to be of use to others in real need. In October 2005, once I had completed my studies, I visited the Perm Memorial Society to discuss army call-up and alternative service in the community. I found out that volunteers met on Thursdays to watch films not on general release, discuss

and were waiting to go to children’s homes. While we were working I came to realise that the children living in the centre were no different from any others. They were cheerful and thorough, though perhaps more quarrelsome than those living at home.

The simplest way to connect with them was to treat them as if they were living at home. Then the children

‘When I help someone in need I give them part of myself. At present I am doing domestic jobs for an elderly man. From time to time I help a woman with three children to get her pushchair to the shops. By helping someone I am interacting with them and am not lonely myself. I do not ‘work’ as a volunteer; volunteering is my life. For me Memorial is and always will be a source of life, warmth, and kindness.’

Irina Mardonova

‘I volunteer because I like getting involved in different activities. When the Open Youth Forum of the Perm Region was on, I invited visitors to the Perm Fair to write on a piece of cloth with the idea of creating a Peace Canvas. I like getting together with a lot of other people, and undertaking some activity with them.’

Ivan Panyukov

‘I enjoy the team spirit. It is important that others share my view that something is significant. Fellow volunteers and I vindicate our civil rights by helping others. We are needed to put up wallpaper, and in doing this we help lonely children. You can sense the team spirit amongst the volunteers – the special emotional atmosphere. When you help others, you add a little more beauty to the world. The more people help each other, the more goodness there will be!’

Alexandra Nadeikina
Coordinator of Volunteer Social Activities for ‘Young Memorial’

CONTACT DETAILS

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pmem@perm.raid.ru
http://memo.perm.ru/en_about_01.htm



Photo: Jacob Mobbs

Memorial’s ‘patchwork for peace’ on display at Perm Day Carnival

practical problems over a cup of coffee, and learn where help was needed. This might be wallpapering an orphanage or cleaning an elderly person’s windows. Whilst new wallpaper will not in itself bestow happiness, you will have helped improve the lives of the children, if only in a small way.

I decided to become a Memorial volunteer and began to go to the ‘Thursdays’. On the one hand, I got to know new and interesting people, watched amazing films and broadened my range of interests. On the other, I got an opportunity to help those in need.

That winter, we went to a children’s rehabilitation centre to wallpaper one of the rooms. The boys and girls of 9-11 had recently been orphaned

responded, and we wallpapered together. While the girls whose room we were decorating worked, they listened to music on Pop Radio, Hit FM and cassettes, as children do. We endured the whole repertoire from ‘Krasok’ to ‘Usher’ unflinchingly, with faint hope of a change of station. The really important thing is to be needed; and these children were perhaps pleased not only with the wallpaper but also with the attention they received and the fact that they were needed.

My family and friends do not think there is anything out of the ordinary in studying, going out, mixing with others and working as a volunteer.’

Misha Danilovich

RUSSIA: PRISON VISITS

Visiting prisoners in Russia

Jonathan Sutton

Lecturer in Russian, University of Leeds

This summer I went to visit a prisoner to whom I've been writing since 2002. I had first come across him (let me call him Oleg) in an Orthodox newspaper which publishes details of prisoners who want to receive letters. Oleg's name stood out because he wanted to learn English. As it turned out, one can't teach a prisoner English by letter, because there's a ban on the use of languages other than Russian. No matter: our correspondence has taken a different direction, mainly serving to take the edge off Oleg's isolation. Oleg is serving a life sentence for murder, having received clemency after 5 years on death row.

I wrote asking the colonel in charge of the prison for permission to visit, as when I first visited Oleg in 2004 for the Orthodox Christmas. Oleg was called in and cross-questioned about me and, because the colonel saw nothing sinister in my connection with the prisoner, my visit was approved. Indeed, I found the prison staff consistently obliging and civil.

Oleg was entitled to four four-hour visits each year, and I intended to stay four days at Ivdel's only hotel and visit him each day. But, given how far I'd come, I was invited to stay overnight in the guest-wing of the prison (at 118 roubles per night, under five dollars) and Oleg would be let through to the guest-wing for the duration of my visit. This gave him sixty-four hours' worth of visit instead of sixteen.

On the first morning a prison orderly (another prisoner) brought Oleg his guitar, which brought a great smile to his lips, and he began to play various songs.

I hadn't been prepared for this longer visit, not being an immediate (or even distant) relative, but my experience shows that it is possible for a foreigner to do this, so long as they're thoroughly proficient in Russian – it would be impossible otherwise – and have established a pattern of regular and open contact with the prisoner. I'd brought no food with me, but a quick visit to the local shop and the basic kitchen equipment provided saw us through.



'Stop! Forbidden zone. Weapons will be used'

Photo: Jonathan Sutton

Prison administration is laborious. Each pass (propusk) or receipt is written by hand. I saw only one computer screen in the administration building. Nevertheless, I got access to the prison far more quickly than registering at the militsiya.

My experience shows that it is very worthwhile to correspond with a prisoner in Russia. My initial contact with Oleg came through the Orthodox newspaper of Ekaterinburg diocese (www.ekaterinburg-eparhia.ru). Other routes must be available. As with Oleg, many prisoners have no outside contacts, which must be desperately isolating for a man facing a long sentence.

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Friends Network supports Hospice Movement *from page 5*

its own seat on the BCH's Advisory Council and will have a bank account in Minsk to ease the constant headache, well known to project managers working with this region, of how to transmit funds reliably and regularly from the UK to a project in the region. The idea behind Friends (UK) is to bring together and formalise support for the BCH in the UK, and to encourage similar networks in other countries to form Friends groups with Board level input and the ability to monitor and report back to western sponsors.

CONTACT DETAILS

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Young Ukrainian initiates drinking water improvement

The UK Department for International Development (DFID) has a wide-ranging project in Ukraine called 'Democratising Ukraine'. Details can be found on the BEARR website at <http://www.bearr.org/en/node/248>. Its micro-projects cover a broad range of activities. This report illuminates one small corner.

In May 2005 an unemployed 21-year old, Andriy Dovzhko, contacted the hot-line run by the Drohobych city coalition micro-project funded by DFID's Democratising Ukraine Small Project Scheme. He was concerned about the water supply on the street where he lived. He, like other residents, was in despair because all his attempts to draw the local authorities' attention to this issue had failed.

The operator advised him to talk to the Legal Service run by the micro-project, who could provide detailed advice. After some discussion, it was decided that specialists should go and analyse the situation locally. The investigation concluded that the problem lay not in the supply of drinking water but rather its poor quality. The street in question is located not far from a big oil refinery, and oil occasionally leached into the drinking water. Together with micro-project managers and specialists from the Drohobych City Council's Youth Service, which acts as a project partner, they developed a series of steps which needed to be taken to solve this issue. The main task was quite challenging – to mobilise the local community. Ad hoc meetings of local residents were conducted which initiated citizens' appeals to the relevant local government bodies to check the quality of drinking water. Appeals were made to several public institutions including the local Sanitary Epidemiological Station (SES), Drohobych City Council, senior management of the oil refinery, and the Oblast Council.

Not surprisingly, help came very quickly. After the water samples had been taken, the SES found a very high infusion of oil microelements in the drinking water, which in turn caused the authorities to take this case very seriously. First of all, a centralised delivery of drinking water was organised for the locals, and eventually the oil refinery installed new advanced filters which helped to prevent the pollution of drinking water in the area.

Very often, residents of small Ukrainian cities object that things cannot be changed without considerable financial inputs. However, this case in Drohobych demonstrates that ordinary citizens like Andriy can really cause positive changes by mobilising the entire community.

*by Lyudmila Yelcheva,
Democratising Ukraine Team*

The reader will not be surprised to hear that Andriy didn't rest on his laurels and soon joined the micro-project team as a volunteer. While working for the micro-project he learnt many new things and gained practical experience in the field, which also helped him to secure employment in this job-stripped region. A local entrepreneur, who saw how responsible and energetic Andriy was, offered him a job at his enterprise. In spite of being extremely busy, Andriy still allocated some time to volunteer for the project. Recently, he informed the micro-project team that he is currently doing an internship in Poland and his volunteer experience was one of the decisive factors which helped him to win this scholarship.

CONTACT DETAILS

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Seminar on the new Russian law on NGOs

At BEARR's initiative, the Foreign and Commonwealth office is planning to host a seminar on this topic on 2 October at the FCO, King Charles Street, London SW1.

Invited speakers include Alexei Zhafyarov, Head of the Federal Registration Service of the Directorate for Political Parties and the Registration of Public, Religious and Other Organisations; and representatives of Russian and UK NGOs.

Details will appear on the BEARR website as plans firm up. See www.bearr.org >BEARR events >seminars >FCO seminar. If you wish to attend, please contact Elizabeth.Teague@fco.gov.uk

GRANTS AND CONTRACTS

BEARR Trust Small Grants Scheme

A pilot Small Grants Scheme, focused on collaborative NGO projects for the benefit of deaf children in Russia, was launched in early 2006.

Two grants were made as a result of this competition:

To HealthProm, for the project 'Supporting deaf children and their families in the Altai Republic through professional training of local specialists and inclusive activities at day care centres.'

To Help in St Petersburg for the project 'Psychological help for deaf children through art therapy.'

In the case of HealthProm, BEARR's grant has enabled the NGO and its Russian partner organisation Revival to provide a one-day specialised training course focused on deafness (part of a five day training programme on child disability). The course, on how to support and work with deaf children and their families, involved 25 health and social care professionals as well as representatives of disability groups and the regional authorities. New equipment and books for deaf children will also be purchased for the day centre and two booklets on the issues of child deafness will be published and distributed to parents and specialists. This project is part of a larger two-year EU-funded project to develop and pilot a rural integrated approach to working with children with disabilities and family support.

The St. Petersburg Charitable Medical Society 'Help' works to provide medical and psychological support to orphans, as well as to those who provide refuge for orphans. BEARR's grant is funding a project called 'We Are Stars' to raise awareness of orphans with hearing difficulties in the city. Raising awareness is a vital step towards helping deaf children to find families. There will be various competitions to find the best drawing, article, poem etc, to make the project appealing and fun as well as putting across a clear message. BEARR's involvement will help to raise the profile of the event and to bring awareness of the event – and the plight of deaf orphans – to a larger public.

The next Small Grants Scheme, for projects starting in early 2007, will focus on homelessness. Details will be found on the BEARR website in due course.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

This hitherto regular feature of BEARR Newsletters has now migrated to the BEARR website, where it can be found in a fuller, more permanent, and searchable format.

Please visit www.bearr.org



HealthProm training course participants

Short term contracts with international organisations

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) maintains a database of UK experts willing to be seconded to the OSCE and other international organisations to work on projects in various countries. When an organisation asks for a secondee to do a job the UK wishes to support, the FCO picks the strongest candidate from the database and nominates them. A successful UK candidate will be offered a six-month contract by the FCO with the possibility of extension. They then work for the international organisation.

The FCO has around 250 secondees abroad at any one time with the OSCE, UN, EU or bilaterally with individual governments, working in areas such as:

- Prevention of people-trafficking
- Democratisation and elections
- Gender Equality
- Human Rights
- Minority Rights
- Rehabilitation in post-conflict situations
- Tolerance and non-discrimination

Requirements: good qualifications and a strong CV. Speakers of Russian and languages of the Caucasus and Central Asia are in particular demand. For some examples of secondees' work see www.fcocasestudies.fco.gov.uk

Those interested should send their CV to OSCESecondments@fco.gov.uk

2006 Annual Conference

This year's Annual Conference will take place on 24 November at the Charity Centre off Euston Road in London.

The overarching theme of the Conference will be homelessness. Following an introductory overview, sessions will be devoted to

- children (street and railway children, orphans...)
- young people (how to integrate them into adult society)
- adults (elderly, mental sickness, ex-prisoners...)

The aim is to look at the experience of NGOs and their in-country partners throughout the region, addressing questions such as

- what works and what doesn't
- how to influence policy
- how best to interact with local authorities
- how to disseminate good practice more widely

Our concern is that there are many useful and successful initiatives out there, but they are not having the influence they could because knowledge of them is not sufficiently widespread. In the pre-conference period, we would like to stimulate a discussion on the website about aspects of homelessness – see the Noticeboard on www.bearr.org. The conference will provide an opportunity to consider how BEARR can best support our network of NGOs after the conference.

The conference will also take a look at the latest developments under the recent NGO legislation in Russia.

The conference will be partly sponsored by the Moscow office of the legal firm Baker Botts.

Information on the conference will be posted on the website under BEARR Events as it is firmed up, and you will also be able to apply and pay on-line. Alternatively, if you wish to attend and are not already on our mailing list, please send your email address to info@bearr.org.



Speakers at last year's conference

Congratulations, Noah – and welcome Renate!

BEARR is delighted to report that Noah Birksted-Breen, Information Officer, has been awarded a place on the prestigious Channel 4 Theatre Director Scheme for 2006-07. He will be attached to the Hampstead Theatre for a year as a trainee director, acting as assistant director on all the theatre's main shows, directing rehearsed readings and (hopefully!) productions by the end of the year. See www.c4tds.co.uk

This means, sadly, that Noah will be leaving BEARR, where he worked first as Project Manager in 2001-03, then Information Officer from January 2006. The Trustees will greatly miss him, but wish him every success in his future career.

In Noah's place we are delighted to welcome Renate Wright. Renate has been a hard-working BEARR volunteer for some time, and we look forward to having her with us on a more permanent basis.

Techniques of breathing in an airlocked space

by Natalia Moshina

translated and directed by Noah Birksted-Breen

The English-language premiere of a prize-winning new play from Russia, took place recently at the Red Lion Theatre in London. The play was a co-

production with the Free Theatre of Belarus whose patrons include Sir Tom Stoppard and Vaclav Havel.

Nadia is dying of cancer and befriends a strange young man. Can he help her to face her past and find meaning in her life? The play raises questions about how people survive in stifling social and political situations: an allegory, perhaps, for modern Russia.



Rebecca Gross as Nadia

Dates for your diary

2 October 2006

Seminar on the new law on NGOs in Russia (see page 13)

24 November 2006

BEARR Trust Annual Conference: Homelessness (see page 15)

Details will be sent to BEARR Friends and contacts nearer the time. If you would like further information or an application form, and are not yet on BEARR's mailing list, please see the BEARR website at www.bearr.org or send your email address to info@bearr.org

BEARR's new office

The BEARR Trust has moved to new offices run by Oneworld for a range of charities. We are next door to the Guardian building on Farringdon Road. Please make a note of our new contact details:

The BEARR Trust
2nd Floor
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143-145 Farringdon Road
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Tel: + 44 (0)20 7239 1412/1400
Email: info@bearr.org
www.bearr.org

The BEARR Trust endeavours to include as wide a debate and as broad a range of opinions as possible in the Newsletter to capture the diversity of NGO work in the UK, Russia and Eurasia. The BEARR Trust cannot be held responsible for the views expressed by authors in their articles.

About The BEARR Trust

Patrons: The Duchess of Abercorn, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Elena Bashkirova Barenboim, Lady Fall, Myra Green OBE, Professor Geoffrey Hosking, Lady Hurd, HE Sir Roderic Lyne KBE CMG, Sir Jonathan Miller CBE, Anthony Oppenheimer, Rair Simonyan, Sir Andrew Wood GCMG

The BEARR Trust is a British registered charity. It was formed in 1991 to act as a bridge between the welfare and health sectors of Britain and the former Soviet republics. Its mission is:

- to promote and support cooperation between the third sector in the United Kingdom and appropriate partners in Russia and Eurasia, especially in health and social welfare, with a view to strengthening civil society.

The Trust will do this by:

- supporting organisations committed to reform in the health and social sectors
- facilitating networking and exchange of information
- encouraging sharing of experience and learning
- helping organisations working in the region to identify potential partners
- providing seed funding to assist selected organisations to launch or extend partnerships
- lobbying with and on behalf of organisations that share our objectives.

Trustees: Michael McCulloch (Chairman), John Church, Stephen Dalziel, Lesley Dean (to August 2006), Yuri Goligorsky, Daryl Hardman, Marcia Levy, Ann Lewis CMG, Nicola Ramsden

Staff: Information Officer: Noah Birksted-Breen (to 31 August); Renate Wright (from 14 September)

Volunteers: Renate Wright, Philip Michaelson, Martin Edwards

Editor: Ann Lewis Registered charity no: 1011086

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Become a Friend of BEARR and receive the Newsletter as well as details of our events throughout the year. If possible, please subscribe and pay through our website at www.bearr.org – this eases our administrative burden. Otherwise, return the form with your cheque to The BEARR Trust office.

- I wish to become a Friend of The BEARR Trust. Minimum gift £30 per year.
- I wish to renew my Friend's subscription and enclose a cheque for £30.
- I wish to make a donation and enclose a cheque for £..... (payable to The BEARR Trust).
- I wish to make a regular donation by banker's order.

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