

MAKING LIFE BETTER

for the Children of Chernobyl

By Russ Disotell

Most people in the area are familiar with Canadian Aid for Chernobyl, through their Shoeboxes for Seniors and Children's Relief from Radiation programs, but actually these are only the tip of the iceberg. What you see here is only a small part of their efforts. "Most of the work happens in Belarus", says Dave Shaw, a founding Director of Canadian Aid for Chernobyl and the force behind their continuing Humanitarian and Orphan Initiatives.

The list of initiatives and programs is lengthy and impressive and a testimony to the commitment of those involved. "There are a great number of wonderful, dedicated people involved", Dave offers, "Many who have put years of effort into these projects. When you look at this list of projects, it is important to remember that Canadian Aid for Chernobyl doesn't just fund them, they are involved in all aspects. They are involved in planning, fund-raising, development, building or purchasing facilities, renovating if necessary, and negotiating with the local authorities. Every initiative, past, present and going forward, is hands on with our organization", stresses Dave. "Charitable work hardly seems an adequate term."

The group were responsible for establishing the Dream Mountain Crisis Centre for Women and Children, the first "safe house" in the country. In 2015 the program was expanded to include children removed from their homes due to domestic violence and abuse. The Crisis Centre, not only provides a safe haven, but allows access to counselling and care.

Partnerships with orphanage directors in Belarus have seen complete libraries, new computers, small kitchens, musical instruments and mini vans (to name just some of the donations) provided to help build confidence, self-esteem and self-worth among the children. A once alarming suicide rate for these at risk children has plummeted to nearly zero, in large part due to these efforts. In addition to providing these much needed resources, Canadian Aid for



Kristina and Masha getting ready to head off with Riley to get their ears pierced!

Chernobyl, through their supporters, have completed renovations in a number of area orphanages.

These are only a few of many projects the group has. To see a comprehensive list of initiatives, go to their website at www.canadianaidforchernobyl.com.

Dave dates his involvement from the early 1990's through his business, Alan Browns Clothiers. When his daughter Riley turned 6 they decided to become involved as a host family. It turned out their first visitor, an 8 year old girl, had a severe bladder and kidney infection, which was treated and cured by the time she returned home. Dave remembers that, "In Belarus they thought it was a miracle!" In April of 1998 they went, as a family, to Belarus for 10 days, visiting orphanages and families. "Riley described it as the best, most meaningful vacation ever." It grew from there. By fall the first 40 foot container of aid was shipped. This year the 128th container will be shipped.

Dave admits that, "To stay motivated I need a new initiative every year. I'm always looking for new initiatives." His latest project is to establish a "Rescue House" for children in severe or difficult family situations. "There is a desperate need for this type of facility." The house would provide a safe environment and proper family structure, with on site

trained staff and proper equipment and tools to help provide a better education.

In mid-September, Dave will fly to Belarus to take part in a hockey school at the Chausy Orphanage, an initiative started and funded by the owners of Kanata's Canadian Tire outlet. "It provides some fun, exercise and normalcy for the children involved." Once the camp is done the real work continues. He will work out the details for the "Rescue House" with the government. The actual house has to be found and purchased. The renovations have to be started, equipment and furnishings arranged and the process of staffing begun. The spring delivery of 2016 has to be arranged as well as distribution of the aid.

Adding to the difficulties this year is the world monetary market. Dave points out, "The Canadian dollar is down against the U.S. dollar and the Ruble has been in a downward spiral. We are looking at increased costs as a result."

The group has a profound appreciation for all of their generous supporters. Moving forward there is always a need and any contribution is greatly appreciated. All of the humanitarian donations go directly to those in need. There is no administrative overhead whatsoever. LH