



Lastoscka Orphanage

Ian Reed

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Ian is an English expatriate based in Sakhalin. He has been with the Sakhalin 2 project for 5 and a half years and is the Marine Manager.

I have been visiting the Lastoscka orphanage for just over five years, which is about the same amount of time I have lived in Sakhalin. Lastoscka means swallow in Russian, and in summer a lot of them can be seen flying around. The orphanage is in the country and about a 30 minute drive from the Zima village where I live. There are over a hundred children living there aged between 3 years and 18 years.

A group of us visit the children every fortnight. We usually go on the second Sunday of the month, and the last Sunday of the month. For the first of our two monthly visits we take along ball games and outdoor equipment to play with. Except in winter when the ground is buried beneath several feet of snow. At this time of year we take paper and crayons, puzzles and other indoor games to play together.

On the last Sunday of the month we take birthday presents for all the children at Lastoscka that have had birthdays that month; and other smaller presents to play pass the parcel with. That way no-one feels they're missing out and everyone has a chance of getting, what we have dubbed, a "pocket money" present.

Over the years I have learnt enough Russian to be understood (a little!) and can understand most of what the children ask. But language is not so important, most are looking for a smile and a hug and for you to remember their name. Recognition is tremendously important. When we arrive for our visits we are greeted by a bunch of happy faces all wanting to be recognised, and all hoping for a Chupa Chup lollipop. The word soon

spreads that the "Amerikanskis' are here", and there are always a lot of children trying to help carry the bags up.

A highlight of the year for me, regarding my voluntary work (indeed friendship) with these children, is the Christmas party we throw for them each year in Zima. It is quite a challenge to move more than 100 young people from the orphanage to the village and still comply with the company safety rules, but our bus drivers willingly help out and do a stellar job. In preparation for the celebrations, we ask the orphanage for a list of all the children's names and ages and then we go around the camp inviting families to pick a name, buy a suitable present and deliver the gift wrapped to the party. It's a wonderful evening for all. One of the things we do at the party, that the children especially love, is a photo display of pictures of them taken over the year. The pride on their faces, when they watch their images projected on screen for all to see, is a very special moment.

The visits give me great satisfaction - being able to add a smile to the kids' faces for a few hours a week. It certainly teaches you that the best things in life are free. The children have very little but are happy and grateful for anything you can give them. Life does not revolve around \$200 toys with batteries but rather simple games and interaction with the other children.



Volunteers sans frontiers

Lynne Allard

Marc Roos is an HR business partner for Pecten Cameroon Company in Douala, Cameroon. He has never been to the Ukraine, but he contributed to a project that provides better access to education and agricultural development programs for rural communities.

Marc made a difference from his home PC, through the Online Volunteering service managed by the United Nations Volunteers. He contributed his business expertise to 'polish' the Crimean Integration and Development Programme's application for European Union funding. You can see some of their work at www.undp.crimea.ua.

The UN Volunteers OV service connects Non-Government Organisations (NGO's) working on sustainable human development projects with skilled online volunteers. Since

the program began in 2000, some 8000 virtual volunteers have contributed skills in areas including, but not limited to, communication, translation, research, technical consultancy, creative design, and information technology.

Marc became aware of the OV initiative through Shell's Project Better World, and would happily participate again. His advice to potential candidates is simple: "Anyone can do it, but it's imperative to get clear communications upfront as to what is required".

If you think online volunteering might be for you, you can find out more at www.onlinevolunteering.org.

In the global village, we can all be good neighbours.



Visits to Dom Ribienka

Dominique Boulstridge

I am part of a small group of volunteers (expatriate wives from the Zima complex) who take it in turn to deliver a weekly contribution of bananas, apples and biscuits to Dom Ribienka, the orphanage on the other side of town. We use a fund provided by voluntary financial contributions and the occasional requests and collections throughout the camp. We are also happy to pass on babies' clothes, in good condition, donated by many families on the camp.

The visits are not glamorous. We do not really see much of the children or have any significant contact with them. However, we are happy to visit the orphanage and to continue the good work started on the orphanage's own terms and conditions. We presume that they have their own reasons for not encouraging contact with the children and this may possibly be based on tradition, health issues, pride, security and emotional involvement from both sides.

The orphanage building is quite old fashioned, like many of the buildings in Yuzhno, but is clean and well maintained. We always receive a warm welcome at the orphanage and are thanked for our contributions. A good relationship has been established with the staff within our limited knowledge and understanding of Russian.

We think that our weekly visits and contributions not only give the children a chance of fresh fruit and biscuits but also show our desire to befriend the Russian community. In this way, we are able to share a little of our good fortunes with those who have less: a gap is bridged and goodwill is shown. It's a modest gesture but we consider that it is worthwhile.

Standing Up Against Breast Cancer in The Netherlands

Pam Larson

Pam is an American expatriate and is based in The Hague for two and a half years. She resides in Delft with her family.



“Why would you get involved in funding breast cancer research in the Netherlands - you’re not Dutch and you don’t even have breast cancer?” asked Mr. Janssen, chief executive of a local telecommunications company. “Well, I answered, and after taking a large gulp, I dove into my elevator speech about why I became involved with the American Women’s Club of The Hague’s Pink Gala. The speech was good but the cause is great, and he was easily convinced; another corporate table is filled with a generous donation. As I leave his office, my mobile telephone rings, it is Susan.

“Did you get it?” she asks.

Susan Rassel (Shell Downstream IT Communications Advisor) and I have been working together since August organizing and planning the event, to be held next March in The Hague’s Grote Kerk. Susan was a member of the organization team last year and this year was made Co-Chairwoman. She needed another Co-Chair and kindly approached me for assistance.

Standing Up Against Breast Cancer is the motto of the Pink Gala, and the strength of that statement is merely a glimpse into what is being done both to increase awareness through advocacy and to fund valuable research. In fact, all funds raised by the Pink Gala go towards breast cancer advocacy, education and research. Over the past five years, the American Women’s Club has raised over 500,000 Euros and donated the money to doctors in the Netherlands conducting research as well as the BorstkankerVereniging Nederland (BVN), a patient organization dedicated to increasing breast cancer awareness and education in the Netherlands.

The Pink Gala has grown substantially over the last five years, from a “Spring Ball” in 2002 with 100 guests to the last “Pink Gala” held in March 2006 at the Grote Kerk in The Hague with 400 guests. Beyond its noble initiatives, the Pink Gala is an outstanding opportunity to bring together Dutch and expatriates for an evening of fun and celebration. “It is like throwing a really cool dinner party for 400 of your

closest friends, with a very special twist” explains Deb Parks (partner of Shell Employee Mark Bouzek), one of last year’s Pink Gala Co-Chairwomen. This year, Deb is involved in organizing and setting up a structure for the Gala’s Request for Proposal (RFP) Program. All medical professionals and organizations seeking funds must complete an RFP and will then be judged by a panel of doctors, specialists and others on whether or not they will receive funding from gala proceeds

Susan echoed these comments when we spoke about working together on this year’s Pink Gala: “It is an opportunity for the American expatriate community to come together with the Dutch community and work together to help find measurable, tangible and relevant solutions to fighting breast cancer,” she explained. Like Mr. Janssen, I found myself asking ‘why not’ rather than ‘how could I’?

Despite a strong culture of volunteerism in the Netherlands, events like the Pink Gala are relatively few in a country where state support of medical research is guaranteed. It would be easy to sit back and let that trend continue, but there are always opportunities to do more. I was raised with the lesson that “those to whom much is given, much is required,” and the Pink Gala has offered an opportunity to Susan, Deb, myself and many others at the American Women’s Club to respond. That to me is worth every phone call, text message, email and elevator speech I can make.

For more information or the opportunity to donate directly, please refer to www.pinkribbongala.org

Why Volunteer?



Tom Henley

Tom, based in Gabon, considers some of the motivators for the large volunteer network at Camp Yenzi.

Working for free and giving up your valuable time to take on responsibilities that need not concern you does not seem to be terribly attractive or sensible; so why would anyone do it? This was the question I put to some of the many volunteers whose regular contributions help make Ecole Yenzi's extra curricular activities so diverse and popular.

Ecole Yenzi is situated in a beautiful tropical Shell camp in Gamba, Gabon. Ten minutes from deserted white sandy beaches, fringed by rainforest and on the shores of a lake, the children have a privileged lifestyle that few people in the 'outside world' can fully comprehend.

In many small communities the school is often the beating heart. Andrew, a working father comments, "it is a small school community and my contribution is more important as there are fewer parents available to support a wide range of activities for the children." The children's energy and enthusiasm can motivate adults to do the strangest and most generous of things, at what other time than a school fair would you step up and volunteer to have wet sponges thrown at your head for half an hour? We were all children once. Perhaps by volunteering to work with children, adults find a way to get in touch with distant school memories?

At Ecole Yenzi parents help run the libraries, work in the office and contribute to class projects by coming in and talking to the children. The Dutch stream of our school enlists the help of a group known as 'The Reading Mums'. This group of five ladies arrive at school early each Tuesday and Thursday to help the children with their reading books. Jet, one of the Reading

Mums said, "the parents contribute a lot to the school and that helps make it the great place that it is."

Once a week the children ride their bikes through the shady avenues of palm trees and down to the club. This is where our weekly swimming lessons are held in the pool overlooking the lake and distant inland mountains. Without the buoyant enthusiasm shown by ten very committed parents whose patience and resourcefulness knows no bounds, these lessons could not continue.

Then there's Richard who teaches the children music in his lunch hour. "I give kids the opportunity to do something enriching that they otherwise would not get to do. Teaching guitar, or anything for that matter, is fun. I enjoy the enthusiasm of the students and seeing them develop their skills and challenge themselves."

Bart, newly arrived from South Africa responds to my questioning on his motives for running an after school activity with a characteristic candour; "I was asked! I've always enjoyed playing sports but it never occurred to me that the kids play baseball in Yenzi." I persist, but what do you get from it? "Well, the warm fuzzy feeling of being involved in voluntary work of course! And it's a good excuse to get out the office early..."

So there are a variety of motivations that drive people to volunteer in the Camp Yenzi community; civic duty, enjoyment of the children's company, a sense of imparting knowledge and knocking off work early. Do most of the volunteers have children of their own? Yes. Does this give them a vested interest in being involved? Yes. Does this matter? No.

Are they making the world a happier and better place? I like to think so.