



I was very pleased to return to Belarus in June 2015, accompanied by Melanine Hinks. We stay with the Kartozova family again, whom I have known for many years. They are doing well; Yana then eldest is now twenty years old and starting the last year of training to become a nursery school teacher, Polya is about to start the last year of her training to become an architect, while Alicia, Kostya and Mila are all excelling in their studies at school.

Families

Andrei, Irina and children

Andrei and Irina are doing well. They now have five children with Maxim being born six months ago. In the last year, Bridges to Belarus has helped the family by purchasing a set of bunkbeds and some bedroom furniture. Their house repairs are going very well and they are currently working to make a bedroom in the loft so that the boys can have a separate room when they are older; they are currently sleeping in their parents' bedroom.



Luda and family

Luda, who has two daughters of her own, two adopted and for the last year, has had Igor living with them as a foster placement. He is just about to turn three years old and suffers from fairly severe eczema and allergies. Luda is hoping to adopt him in the near future. The family do not currently have a washing machine

and were struggling with washing for so many people, so we bought one for them. Having a very active, small child in the house has caused some problems with space, particularly in the kitchen. We therefore also bought a folding table for their kitchen. The family were delighted with this assistance and it will make a huge difference to their everyday life.

Vera and Sasha

Vera and Sasha are a family that are new to me. Sasha works as a chauffeur and works hard. They have three children; Artom 8, Sonya 4 and Kiril who is ten months old. Kiril has a serious heart condition for which he will require an operation in the next year. The family have taken out a mortgage on a flat and have carried out as many repairs as they can afford to make it safe for the children. We were delighted to be able to help them by buying the wallpaper for the flat. They did not have much furniture in the flat and are currently using boxes as cupboards, a sofa and a bed. This is something that I am very keen to address as soon as possible.



Alicia and family



Alicia has four children and no husband. Her mother has always played an essential role in helping to care for the children but this has increased further now as Alicia has had to go to Minsk to work, in order to earn money for the family. Her mother is doing an amazing job of caring for the children but this is very hard for the whole family. We have helped them this year by ensuring that all the children have school

uniforms paid for and stationary, which means that they can attend school.

Oksana

I have known Oksana and her son Sergei for many years now. Sergei has a severe heart condition for which he has required multiple operations and will need

further in the future. Oksana now has a ten month old daughter called Vika, who is currently well and has normal heart scans. Oksana's husband has a significant problem with alcohol and does not help the family financially. Their house has been under repair for three years and they have been living with Sergei's paternal grandmother, who is wonderful. In order to try to help the family with their house and enable them to move back in, we bought a shower cubicle for them, which Oksana has been trying to buy for over a year.



Kolya and Tonya

Kolya and Tonya are doing well. They now have six children with Ksenia, who was born in August 2014. Last year, we bought two sets of bunk beds for the four of the older children, which they are delighted with. The children are all obtaining excellent grades at school and their parents are rightfully very proud of them.

Alla and family

Alla is Kolya's sister and her newest son, Philip, was also born in August 2014. Alla had lost many babies in late pregnancy or soon after birth previously due to a blood incompatibility (Rhesus disease). With Philip, she now has five surviving sons which means that the family are entitled to more government support. Last year, we bought a set of bunk beds for the family, which they are delighted with. The beds are currently in their living room, as they do not have enough bedrooms for all the children but they may be able to extend the house in the future.



Natasha and daughters

Natasha and Sasha have four daughters. Sasha works on the communal farm just outside Rogachev and works very hard but the pay is low. Natasha's daughters,



Alexandra, Kristina, Olga and Maria are all doing very well at school and Alexandra excels particularly in English language, which she may pursue at university, if, like her cousin, she is able to obtain a scholarship. Both Alexandra and her cousin were previously taken to America several times with a charity but this has stopped now that they are over 14 years old. In order to help the family, we have paid for school uniforms and stationary for all four of the girls so that they can continue to attend school.

Katya and Vitali

Katya and Vitali are a family that I have been aware of for just over a year now. Last year we provided a fridge, cooker and washing machine for them. Unfortunately, their youngest son, Artom, who was born at the end of April, died at just two weeks of age. The family are struggling financially and there are some social issues, which we are trying to support them with as much as possible. This year, we bought food products and toiletries for both the children and adults, which will last them for several months.



Anna and Volodya



Anna and Volodya have five delightful children who are all growing and doing well at school. They have a new house that they will be moving in to in the next year, which will be a massive step for the family. Over the last two years, we have bought a cooker for them and one generous sponsor has provided them with a hot water boiler and funding for some of the repairs needed to the house. I am very excited to see their new house next year!

Irina and sons

Irina has severe epilepsy caused by a brain tumour and has three sons. Irina and her sons are cared for by her mother, who is really struggling. Financially, life is extremely difficult. This is accentuated by Irina requiring treatment that cannot

be performed in Belarus and needs to go to the Ukraine. One of her sons also has significant lung disease, for which he requires treatment in the regional hospital. In order to help the family, we have paid for tickets to the Ukraine for Irina and another person as well as for travel to and accommodation near the regional centre for Irina's son and someone to go with him.

Natasha and family

I first met Natasha three years ago with her children, Ruslan, now 13 years old, Aleksander 6 and Zlatamira 5. Natasha's husband, Sergei, had to work away and has now left the family. When we visited, we found that the family were really struggling. They have one bedroom, which we have furnished with bunkbeds. In the living room is a bed, but no sofa and the eldest son and mother take turns



at sleeping on the floor. We found a very large corner sofa that converts into a bed which can easily sleep three people, so we bought this for the family. This means that at least everyone has somewhere safe to sleep but the family can also use the living room as such for the whole family.

Galina's family

Galina's (who heads up Sails of Childhood, our main link organisation in Belarus) family continue to expand; Katya, her second daughter, who has wanted a second child for many years, gave birth to a little girl, Diana, whilst we were there. She is beautiful and was welcomed into the family during a traditional party, which we were very touched to be part of.

Sails of Childhood

As usual, we were able to buy a large bag of washing powder and a large bottle of fabric conditioner for every family that Sails of Childhood, our main link organisation in Belarus, supports. Whilst we are able to buy washing machines for the families, the cost of washing powder is high and many families make to without for most of the year. During



the charity's visit in August, the usual winter food parcels will be distributed as well.

Disabled people's centre



Artwork produced by the centre using old zips

We have supported the disabled people's centre since it was founded, seven years ago. They continue to do very well in national competitions and make items to sell, to raise money for the centre. The staff do an amazing job and are truly inspirational. This year, we were able to help the centre to buy equipment to repair one of the out-



buildings to provide sports facilities. We have also bought equipment such as balls

and racquets for a variety of sports.

Home for elderly people

During our stay, we also visited a new home outside Rogachev for elderly people. These are a very new phenomenon in Belarus as elderly relatives used to be cared for by the family. However, with more people having to move away for work, the need for homes such as this has arisen. The staff caring for the people seemed to do a very good job with very little resources. We were able to make a small contribution by purchasing a bag of toiletries and a cup for every resident (currently 30 in total), with another twenty bags ready for further residents. I very nearly adopted one of the Babushkas that I fell in love with.

School

School number 5 in Rogachev is the school that we have been supporting for the last year. Natasha, the headmistress, has now been there for just over a year and has made a number of impressive changes already. She is an amazing lady who is very similar to Jude Worthington, at St. John's College School in Cambridge. I hope to enable them to communicate as Natasha is dynamic in her thinking and will move the school forward in even more interesting ways. I was very pleased

on this occasion to be able to support the school by purchasing five new magnetic black boards, as many of their boards are so old that they cannot be written on. We were also able to buy a top-end camera with video functionality, so that the school can record events and document significant achievements. The school is also happy to host the English language summer school again in August, during which time, I hope we will be able to support them further.

Thank you

As always, I am extremely grateful to all our supporters who enable us to continue with our work in Belarus. Your help has made life-changing differences to many families and the whole community in Rogachev over the years. All our costs for the trip were covered personally, as I am proud that Bridges to Belarus uses all donations to directly help the children and community that we support.

If you would like more information about the charity, our work or any of the families, please contact me at rachel.furley@gmail.com