



AUGUST 2013 – VISIT TO BELARUS

I accompanied Rachel on a successful trip to Belarus in June 2013 when, working closely with the local charity director Galina, we offered the normal range of support from B2B for projects in and around the town of Rogachev. However, as other committee members had commitments over the summer months, it was agreed that I would travel unaccompanied to Rogachev in August to represent B2B.

I again stayed with the Kartuzov family who have always made me extremely welcome in their lovely home. The mother, Lena, had made a good recovery from the broken ankle she had suffered during our last visit though sadly her husband, Sasha, was admitted to hospital during my stay to recover from a bout of pneumonia. Fortunately their five children were still on their long school holidays (which last from the beginning of June to the beginning of September) so they were able to help with household tasks and harvesting fruit and vegetables from the family garden to preserve in glass jars ready to use during the long winter months.

B2B SUMMER SCHOOL PROJECT

Following the success of the pilot project in August 2012 when 24 students attended a week of classes to meet and converse with two native English speakers for one hour a day over five consecutive days, it was decided that time and resources would allow B2B to offer a similar course again.

Since 2012 Sergey - our contact at the Gymnasia School - has found alternative employment but was still happy to co-ordinate plans for the classes and liaise with the new teacher, Yana Suryak, on my behalf. However, as this visit was later in the year many of the students were away from the area and so only 15 pupils from that school were able to attend as it had been impossible to extend the invitation to the other local schools before they broke up for the holidays.

As last year, all except two of the students were girls but this year their ages ranged from 13 to 16 years, so they were all very confident and extremely enthusiastic. I worked with three students per session and, as six of them had attended last year, I ensured I had a good range of new resources to show and discuss. Everybody was delighted to hear news of our royal family and Prince George (born on my birthday!) and talking about London, my home county of Dorset and UK national news were also favourite topics. I found this size of group was manageable whilst still allowing everybody to have good input and able to see the resources and photos I had loaded onto a small tablet.

I had a daily timetable which was subject to change according to the needs, interests and/or dynamics of each group and linked to homework assignments but was also careful to ensure that everybody had fun because they were giving up time in their summer break to attend. We enjoyed tongue twisters, word games and others which I had devised to encourage the students to talk about themselves but the card games of 'Uno' (numbers) and 'What' (numbers and shapes) were requested every day!

On the first day of classes I was mortified when one student asked me to talk more quietly, but later discovered that she had meant to ask if I would talk more slowly! However, after the first day I found that the students were able to understand me very well and so we made some excellent progress with only the occasional need to refer to my dictionary!!



Future Projects and Contact with the Gymnasia School

I was invited to meet the headmistress of the Gymnasia School on the last day of the Summer School and she reiterated how grateful she was for the input of B2B to enable this project to take place. She has invited me to arrange a similar course for next year and I would like to liaise with Yana over the next few months to ensure that arrangements are made for this to take place when students from nearby schools are also able to attend and thus ensure that all students come from poorer backgrounds and could not therefore afford to pay for private lessons.

In addition, I intend to maintain contact with Yana throughout the academic year as she has asked me to help by sending information from the UK to enhance her lessons. This will be an interesting exercise for me, especially as she and her headmistress have asked if I will consider arranging to ‘Skype’ regularly – once I have upgraded my internet connection in the hope of being able to do so!

Gifts for Gymnasia School

It was not possible for Rachel to visit the school when we visited in June as it had already closed for the summer holidays, so I was asked to enquire if resources were needed for the forthcoming year.

In consultation with the other staff who teach English it was decided that gifts of two music systems which can play CDs, radio and audio files from a USB or MP3 player (B2B purchased two systems last year which have proved invaluable), some folders and punched pockets and a year’s supply of paper would be most useful. I then heard that the school would be hosting a prestigious meeting for teachers from across the region early next year so later purchased another box of 5 reams of paper to ensure that there would be sufficient to print off all the paperwork needed for this event.



Pictured above from the left:
 Headteacher of the
 Gymnasia School, teachers
 from the English Department
 with ex-teacher
 Sergey Liseichikov, new
 teacher Yana Suryak seated
 left and three students with
 gifts from B2B

SAILS OF CHILDDHOOD CHARITY

During my visit it was a great pleasure to liaise with Galina, the director of this charity, and provide financial assistance from B2B for projects to help families over the forthcoming months.

A number of children were due to start school at the beginning of September and so backpacks and appropriate stationery were purchased.



In addition stationery was purchased for older students and food packages containing staples such as oil, flour, rice and pasta were distributed to those families able to collect them or delivered to families unable to travel into Rogachev. It was lovely to meet these families, many of whom I have come to know well over the years, but incredibly moving knowing what a difference these gifts will make to their lives over the next few months.





During my visit I was delighted to be invited to meet Galina's new grandchildren – Violetta was born on 27 July and Nikita arrived as my plane was landing at Minsk on 16 August!

CONCLUSIONS

I again felt very privileged to have been entrusted to represent B2B and its interests in and around Rogachev. Whilst initially disappointed that this year's Summer School Project was not able to grow in size, I believe this low-key approach has helped to cement a relationship with the new teacher at the Gymnasia School so that future projects can be built up on firm foundations.

It is always very moving but hugely satisfying to be able to see how much aid is provided by B2B to help families supported by the local 'Sails of Childhood' charity – especially at this time of year when parents have the worry of additional expense to provide items to enable children to attend school and the prospect of a harsh winter. I felt very humble as I met families who asked me to convey their thanks and best wishes to everybody involved with B2B but also heartened when I heard from others who had received help in the past and are now able to manage without aid and offer help to the local charity.

I believe that this has been another successful trip to Belarus and hope that it will be possible for B2B to continue to offer support for such projects by working closely with our local contacts in Rogachev.

Sheila Furley