



St Gregory's Foundation

Helping vulnerable children and families in Russia and Georgia

Summer news 2020



At home with everyone. Exclusive lockdown stories

More than at any other time we want to use this space to offer thanks. You have this newsletter in your hands (or on your screen) which means you're still with us, our projects and our Russian and Georgian partners. We want to thank most sincerely all the people who like us have been coping with the unknown during these uncertain times but kept picking up phones and emailing us with the most generous offers of help and words of support.

We thank all of you who made donations, subscribed to our emails, offered to volunteer and sent us delicious survival soup recipes! We salute your understanding, stoicism, resilience and humour.

We are grateful for your personal stories and for bearing with us and our increased number of emails and news in these digitized and 'zoomed' times. It has been a challenge to reinvent the way we work and hold the Board meeting online but we feel we have made good progress on making the

last meeting the shortest ever whilst enjoying Sebastian's very creative background!

We thank all our partners, who have been incredibly hard working and innovative in their kitchens and bedrooms, adjusting to deliver online training classes for disabled children and orphanage-leavers. And to all who have been working tirelessly to deliver food and essentials during these trying times.

Your continued support has kept their work going and spirits high.

One day this will end and we'll meet up again. In the meantime, here's to your health and enjoy reading our stories!

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Registered charity no. 1002469

Patron: HRH Prince Michael of Kent GCVO

Food parcels instead of lunches

Until recently Karelia remained under a strict quarantine with a few Karelian towns isolated, with police at entry roads. All public activities were being put on hold until further notice from the state and local authorities. As quarantine rules still remain unclear Father Lev and his helpers were advised not to conduct the outdoor camp in Novinka for teenagers. The summer camp at the Parish house and Munozero dacha has also been at risk until recently.

This would have meant that the children from poor families could be most affected – for many the daily lunches provided by the Parish are the only nutritious meals throughout the long summer months which help them to get physically stronger. By being fed at the Parish, it also helps their parents to save on essentials. Many children come to the Parish because they suffer from neglect by their alcoholic parents, but in some cases the families simply struggle because of poorly paid work, illness or the absence of one parent, in particular in families with several children.

We were told that due to the quarantine and the worsened economy of the last months many of these families had become desperate and were struggling to make ends meet more than ever. At Easter, the Parish delivered food parcels to the most needy using its own funds as the severity of the food shortages became evident.

We recently came across an article in the Moscow Times about the situation with food parcels in Karelia. Photographs of two smoked sausages and a handful of raw potatoes intended to last children two weeks in the northwestern town of Pitkyaranta drew national media attention. “Five potatoes, two sausages, a stick of margarine, half a kilo of sugar and a kilo of flour... Parents found a beetle in one of the bags of flour,” read a message on the local community forum. Needless to say that the regional officials announced that they would suspend the distributions and fire the head of the school meals provider after the photographs set off nationwide outrage.

As you can appreciate, the daily lunches for the children from poor families will be needed more than ever. The Parish won't be hosting lunches at the



parish house but they will be delivering food parcels to 49 children and 28 parents. These food parcels will contain the most essential items: cereals, pasta, canned meat and fish, dairy, fruits, vegetables, sweets, etc. to help families through these difficult times. Children will receive school supplies, shoes, clothes and medicines where needed. All this work will be done by volunteers who offer their own transport to help with deliveries.

For those who have Internet access, the Parish is working out a programme of online classes in crafts and cooking and for parents - online consultations with local psychologists, teachers, speech therapists, a doctor and social workers. Some of the specialists are long-standing volunteers at the Parish.

We are very grateful to Skincode and the Order of St John for their contributions that will allow the Parish to help some of these families to cope in these days of crisis.

If you would also like to contribute and help the Parish to buy more food parcels and reach out to more children in need - any donations will be gratefully received.

Adapt and stay in touch: A-tech and Sunflower



Masha waits for her class

The transition to online work has required a great deal of planning and discussion. Initially, our partners who run **A-tech** in St Petersburg and Moscow were overwhelmed by the amount of work required to get online training sessions working.

As Anastasia Ryazanova, the director of “Communication Space” Centre in Moscow, recalls: “It felt like our computers and telephones were hot when we discussed what to do next”. The sudden change in domestic routines under quarantine was hardest for those with the most severe disabilities and it was not easy for parents either.

Orphanage-leavers who live independently are extremely vulnerable during the crisis. With no family support, their level of anxiety and fear is high. Many of them have lost their informal jobs and remained without cash benefits which are available for formal jobs.

Sunflower responded swiftly by providing emergency food parcels to the most needy and soon afterwards set up a chatbot to put their young people in direct contact with the organisation during quarantine.

They are also posting several times a day on social media by sharing ideas of how to cope with day to day challenges.

‘Remaining in contact’ became a goal for the A-tech project. It turned out that in addition to 35 families (the regular beneficiaries of two Centres) more families across Russia contacted our partners to get the professional help of specialists in communication, psychologists and physiotherapists. The online format offered a huge advantage to those disabled children and their parents who live far from Moscow or St Petersburg and miss out on the use of modern A-tech technologies and specialists’ advice.

As a result of this the amount of work for our partners has more than doubled. Thanks to St Gregory’s grant which has been quickly repurposed to support online initiatives, more Russian families with disabled children are now able to receive the help of highly qualified specialists directly at home and this is free and accessible to everyone.



The young people need help with planning their budget, cooking (many are used to eating at work or out at cafes), where to go for help if they feel ill or if they have lost their jobs and how to get informed about the guidelines and new patterns of behaviour.



Looking further ahead is difficult in these uncertain times, but Sunflower’s chatbot met the needs of more than 100 young people who live independently and have the least resources.

Sunflower’s support has been crucial for the last few months and remains vital to help young people to build up their resilience.

Sitting at home

When quarantine rules had been set in St Petersburg, it became clear to the Director of the Deaf Club, Valentina Balabanova, that the Club will be out of action for the coming months. This project is unlike our other projects which have continued to work online. The Club's group play and music therapy for impaired hearing toddlers works wonders helping them to distinguish sounds and start communication when they play together in small groups. Similar online sessions can't substitute for live communication.

Lockdown has become a test of endurance for us all. For parents of impaired hearing children staying at home it turned out to be even harder. Such children need specialist support in the vital first years of life when the foundations for communication and relationships are laid. Hit by quarantine, the parents felt that their children were missing out on this valuable help.

Thankfully, Valentina and other specialists found how to help both deaf parents and those with normal hearing to keep working. She organised regular consultations by phone and offered a lot of virtual hand-holding for the parents at the Club's Facebook group. Encouraged by Valentina, some parents like Masha began to support each other through these difficult times by sharing their stories:

"Being a mum is hard work. You have to change your own habits and needs. A mum needs to constantly teach her child knowledge and skills. If their mother doesn't do this, who will? During isolation, a mum is with their child 24 hours a day. Sometimes, it is hard to keep strong while facing the fact that there is no break from this. I have 3 children: the two youngest are hearing impaired. One is three years and two months old and has cochlear implants in both ears. The youngest is nearly two and he wears hearing aids in both ears.



When I am cooking, the kids are of course with me. Not to worry, I take two saucepans and spoons and sing! I sing whatever comes to my mind: bim, bam, bom. Bom on a large pan, bim on a smaller pan, and we tap to the beat. The main thing is to do it really enthusiastically. You can put macaroni or peas in the pot and pour them into different containers. I remember songs or rhymes that don't have many words. e.g. 'The bull swings around, mooing on the move'- I lead the game by swinging the smallest child from side to side by holding his two hands. At this stage, he already likes this game and my older son repeats it with us.

Sometimes, we don't have the energy for outdoor games. Instead, we take plasticine or pencils or markers. Not everyone likes to draw, or more specifically, to draw on paper. Then we take a doll or a plastic car and draw on them, afterwards everything is washed off with water. The main thing then is that after the games the markers need to be put far away!

We also made a road out of plasticine, just stretching it from the table to the floor and rolling the cars down it. Plasticine is also great to sculpt on the fridge while I cook. With the help of pencils, we lay out another road. You can draw a road on sheets of paper, making pedestrian crossings, traffic lights, drawing a house with rooms where our toys will sleep, eat, and work. Most of the time, we play with whatever we have to hand. Household items, all of the older or broken ones we had were put to use."

How can you keep yourself happy, and not get tired of being a mother? Housework, play and children's education being mixed together help to get through these trying times".

Our Club will resume play and music therapy as soon as the quarantine has been lifted.

Life at Mkurnali under quarantine



Georgia's response to the coronavirus outbreak seemed to be more effective compared to other regions: social distancing and other measures were brought in at an early stage and saved a lot of lives.

However, economically, the country was hit hard and Mkurnali experienced all the hardships in full. It is not only that Mkurnali's current residents have lost much of their local income, but the former residents who lost their jobs, had to turn to Mkurnali with pleas to help with food where possible.

Those of you who follow our monthly news from Mkurnali, might have read an incredible story of a former resident, who tried to commit suicide after he had lost his job amidst the coronavirus crisis and with no income he had been evicted. Thank goodness, Mkurnali's residents and Nino stayed alert and came to his rescue – he now lives at the shelter and will stay there until he can start working again.

Despite all, Mkurnali's lawyer Inga continues to provide legal assistance to young offenders at online court hearings. Besides other cases she has been involved with, there is a growing number of domestic violence cases caused by the lockdown. Nino sent us another story:

A few days ago, our former beneficiary Natia asked us to help her neighbours - a young woman and her mother. They have been constantly terrorised by the husband of this young woman. The young

woman and her husband got married two years ago and he moved in to live with his wife and his mother-in-law. The man did not work and lived at the expense of his mother-in-law. Although the family has been struggling to make ends meet and continued to live in a difficult situation, neither of the women reproached him.

After the couple had a baby, the father became more aggressive, often abusing his wife and mother-in-law verbally and physically. As time went on, his abuse became more and more unbearable and the women could not endure it any longer. At his wife's request to get divorced and leave their house, he replied that since his son lives in this flat, his father would not go anywhere. The police have been called several times and a restraining order has been issued.

However, once the one-month restraining order expired the man returned again and continued to terrorize the family. The police did not take any stricter measures since the man did not violate the terms of his restraining order.

Mkurnali helped to collect all the necessary documents and prepare a complaint which has been submitted to the court. Their request was granted and a protective order was issued, for the maximum term of 9 months. If the former neighbour commits any violence towards his family again, he will be sentenced to imprisonment.

News in brief

New Treasurer – sadly Eddy Quah, our current Treasurer, will be leaving St Gregory's at the end of 2020. Eddy has been a rock looking after our finances and he has much improved our accounting system at Quick Books. He is now pursuing his career in line with his interest in wellbeing and resiliency coaching and we wish him well!

If you feel you can offer your expertise or recommend a new Treasurer, email Vivian Wright at vmwright@waitrose.com. You can find more details on our website: www.stgregorysfoundation.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer/

Jane's Jams

It may be some time before we can get together again, but fundraising can go on in lockdown. It has certainly not deterred our indefatigable Jane Jones in Chester!

Jane's impromptu jam sale amongst neighbours and supporters has brought in £248! She is sure that she and the group of supporters from the Chester cathedral will be doing this again as it has proved so popular. Jane will be working on more marmalade and crab apple jelly over the next few weekends and she is sure that the others in the team will be able to contribute some more too. Many thanks to everyone who took part, especially their valiant jam-makers: Lyn Barritt, Caroline Dennis and Val Hamill.

Alexandra Tolstoy's online sale

Despite having to cancel an important fundraising dinner last March, our supporters have not been idle. Our thanks to Alexandra Tolstoy who has raised a further £600 for SGF from an online sale.

Lockdown fundraisers

We are all finding new ways of keeping in touch with friends and keeping boredom at bay, and many people are finding new ways of helping others. You could host an online event, like a quiz, or set yourself a challenge and get sponsored. The sky really is the limit. If you have an idea you'd like to discuss, just get in touch!

Facebook fundraiser

Step 1: Visit www.facebook.com/SaintGregs/

Step 2: Click on Fundraisers on the left

Step 3: Select +Raise Money on the right

Lastly: Follow the instructions to create your own fundraiser, and share, share, share!

Ebay

Have you spent lockdown decluttering? Why not do some good with your old stuff? We may not have a charity shop, but you can raise money for St Gregory's with your unwanted items by selling them on Ebay. Just use the advanced selling option and select St Gregory's Foundation as your chosen charity beneficiary. You can donate between 10% and 100% of the proceeds. Our supporters have helped us raise almost £400 through Ebay.

Raise funds while you shop

Use this link when you shop online with Amazon: <https://smile.amazon.co.uk/ch/1002469-0> and Amazon Smile will donate to St Gregory's. It's a great way to help us when you are buying Christmas presents for the family!

New Assistant for our Executive Secretary



Emma Hobson joined us in March. She writes: 'I am a final year student at the University of Leeds studying Russian and Philosophy. I have spent a year studying at Moscow State University and recently started working for St. Gregory's foundation on a freelance basis as

assistant to Julia Ashmore. Joining St. Gregory's was such an excellent opportunity for me, as I have an avid interest in human rights in Russia, having previously volunteered as a translator for a HIV charity in St. Petersburg. To date, my tasks include summarising and translating funding applications from our Russian partners, sourcing potential grants, etc. I am very excited to continue working alongside the directors, Julia and our wonderful project partners'.

How your donations help

£9 will feed one homeless teenager a balanced diet for 3 days

£18 will fund an online occupational therapy session for autistic and gravely disabled children and their parents.

£36 will provide life-changing therapy and individual support to one "orphan" for a month

£155 will buy food parcels to feed a needy family with two children in Kondopoga every day through the 3-month summer holidays

Keep in touch

- I want to become a member of St Gregory's Foundation and receive the newsletter by post. I enclose a donation of £30 (waged)/£20 (unwaged; students)
- Please send me news by email

Name: _____

Address: _____

E-mail address: _____

Make a one-off donation

Donate online at stgregorysfoundation.org.uk or send a cheque payable to

The St Gregory's Foundation to:

Eddy Quah, Treasurer, SGF

c/o 4 Bushy Court, 20 Upper Teddington Rd,
Hampton Wick, Surrey, KT1 4DU

Don't forget to gift aid your donation!

Make a regular donation

Donate online at stgregorysfoundation.org.uk or return this standing order form

To the manager _____ Bank,

_____ (address)

Acc. No: _____

Sort code: _____

Please pay into the account of: The St Gregory's Foundation, Royal Bank of Scotland, 50/52A White Ladies Road, Bristol, BF8 2NH (sort code 16-12-53, account no.12348109) the sum of £____ starting on ____/____/____ (date) and thereafter on the same day monthly/quarterly/annually (Delete as appropriate). This replaces an existing order in favour of St Gregory's Foundation.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Don't forget to *giftaid it*

If you are a UK tax payer, we would be grateful if you could Gift Aid your donation. This will allow us to reclaim 25p for every £1 you donate.

I wish to Gift Aid my donation of £_____ to St Gregory's Foundation (single donation)

I wish to Gift Aid my donation of £_____ and any donations I make in the future or have made in the past 4 years to St Gregory's Foundation (multiple donation)

I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

Title _____ First Name or initial (s) _____

Surname _____ Full home address _____

_____ Post code _____ Date _____

Past and Future

When St Gregory's started in 1991 it was focused primarily on providing practical help to those who were suffering the severe economic consequences of Glastnost. Container lorries delivered supplies of food and medical equipment and although it was difficult to transfer money to Russia at that time, ways were found to support those who were left practically destitute by the galloping inflation of those years.

Times changed and the economic situation improved although there is still hardship and deprivation. One of the reasons for St Gregory's continuing success is that it has adapted to meet new needs. Now we are more focused on helping local partners build up their knowledge and skills to deliver the best possible support to vulnerable people, creating opportunities for them to fulfil their potential. Our work makes disadvantaged children and families active participants in improving their own lives and encourages the sharing of experience, learning and bringing together the foremost local specialists. We don't know what the future holds for St Gregory's but **next year is an important one for us as it is our 30th anniversary. If you have any ideas as to how we can celebrate this milestone, please get in touch!**

Contact details:

Please send donations to:

Eddy Quah, Treasurer

c/o 4 Bushy Court, 20 Upper Teddington Rd, Hampton Wick, Surrey, KT1 4DU.

For more information or volunteer opportunities contact:

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By the address above.

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SGF Christmas cards – the sale is on!

As you can appreciate, it is hard to plan any live events this year and it already feels as if it has affected our fundraising. Our Christmas cards proved to be very popular with you and with the lockdown or not, we'll celebrate Christmas again!

You can buy cards from now until 1st September with the prices as below. For orders of 10 packs or above we offer free postage. We offer further discounts for orders of over 50 packs – for the latter contact Julia at Julia-sgf@outlook.com or call 0203 372 49921.

We hope that the printers in our area will resume their business as usual - watch out for our news on new card designs from 1st September! Every pound raised from sales will go to our projects and support the work being done under quarantine in Russia and Georgia.



The Nativity cards, 155 x108 mm, envelopes included.



The Russian winter cards, 174 x118 mm, envelopes included.



The Winter Forest cards, 174 x118 mm, envelopes included.

All cards above are £4 per pack of 10 (usual price £5) and contain Christmas greetings in English and Russian. Please add £3 postage and packing for the first pack and 30p for each subsequent pack. You can buy cards online via www.stgregorysfoundation.org.uk or choose your cards above and send your order and a cheque payable to The St Gregory's Foundation to: **Mrs Jane Jones, "Emrys" Kilmorey Park Road, Chester, CH2 3QT.**

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www.stgregorysfoundation.org.uk