



# St Gregory's Foundation

*Helping vulnerable children and families in Russia  
and Georgia*

## Winter news 2020



## Key to communication

The Covid pandemic has been an unwelcome constant this year, and is now shaping a very different Christmas to the one we were expecting at the start of 2020. It's been a very hard year for our families in Moscow and St Petersburg who are raising disabled and autistic children.

Some parents with children with special needs suddenly became full-time carers during the quarantine. Throw in financial difficulties and living in a

tiny flat, and stress levels were off the scale for many parents.

With our help, our colleagues in Moscow promptly launched a free online service to provide psychological support to parents in Moscow and the region and teach psychologists from Pskov, Tolyatti, Samara and Kirov how to reach out to local families. Recently this psychological support was expanded to specialists in Ukraine and Belarus.

Registered charity no. 1002469

Patron: HRH Prince Michael of Kent GCV

# Key to communication

Another specific problem of our projects in the time of Covid is that disabled and autistic children often don't tolerate wearing a protective mask and take them off, making them and their families vulnerable to contamination.

Recently, when the latest quarantine measures were lifted for a short time and sessions continued, one of the boys who returned tested positive for Covid and so did his mother although they were both asymptomatic. All the specialists and young people from his group had to get tested. Thankfully their tests were negative but Communication Space

had to bear the cost of the tests, and suffered a loss of 30,000 Rub from their A-tech budget initially meant for sessions and materials. Facing the reality that this situation can happen again at any time, the Centre is looking for additional £1,000 to cover tests for disabled and autistic children – any support will be most gratefully received.

Your support will allow us to safely continue sessions at the Centre or online for disabled children like Lenya. Such sessions are key to their communication and help expand the children's world in so many ways despite the crisis.

## A-Tech St Petersburg moves to a new home



Since 2008, our partner Physical Rehabilitation which runs the A-tech project in St Petersburg has used the premises of Dinamika School.

In 2013-15, a complete renovation of the school was conducted and partially funded by St Gregory's Foundation. Disabled students at the school could use an adapted "apartment" there to attend workshops, cook, practice social skills, and develop their mobility skills. The apartment is largely used as a classroom now, due to severe overcrowding at the school.

Over the past 2 years, the school constantly reduced the amount of time Physical Rehabilitation could access the premises but the number of families at the A-tech project kept increasing. During the pandemic, no one could enter the school. To solve this problem, last June the A-tech project

started looking for a new place. Finally, such a place was found and last month Physical Rehabilitation spent their own funds (about 1,000,000 RUB) on the new premises: partitioning it, building ramps, repairing, painting and buying tables with wheels and more.

The new premises have space for classes with disabled children, a kitchen where they can learn to cook and eat, and a room for seminars, online training and video broadcasts. Classes were conducted remotely for one week whilst renovations took place and now classes have already begun at the new centre. To make it fully operational, St Gregory's helped purchase some kitchen equipment and other bits and bobs for the kitchen so that our colleagues at A-tech can welcome more families at their new home.



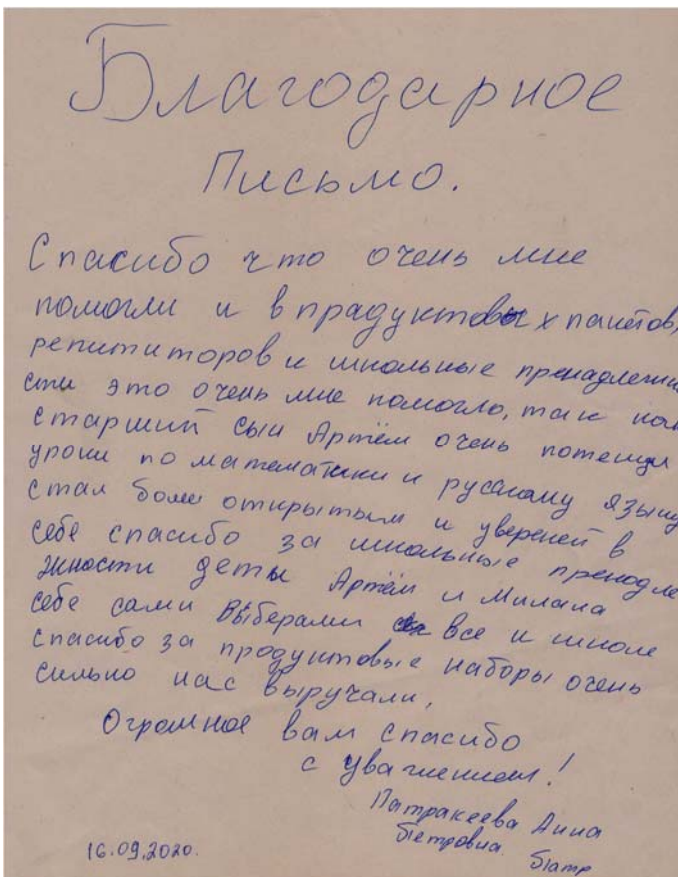
# New Year's gifts for Kondopoga's children

At the time of writing this, London enters Tier 4 which means a complete change of our plans for Christmas and New Year. Many Russian regions are also experiencing a sharp increase in cases and have to face up to a further lockdown over the winter holidays and possibly for longer. In Kondopoga where the restrictive measures were put in place last spring and then returned in autumn there is no sign of relief and there is no way for the Parish to organise children's festive activities and outings. Badly hit economically during the first lockdown, needy families from Kondopoga and nearby are fearful of the new lockdown which can be overwhelming and throw them into further dire straits. To help such families cope and not to leave children behind the Parish is focusing on what they did so brilliantly last summer – mobilizing volunteers and helpers in the community to provide essential food parcels to families to keep them going over the long winter months. For children the Parish will organise parcels with sweets and New Year presents – all deliveries will be done by volunteers too.

Huge thanks to all who made donations in response to our appeal last summer and helped the Parish



and families to live through this year – we have received a lot of letters from the families which we are happy to share with you:



*"Thank you for really helping me out with the food parcels. My oldest son Artem really benefitted from maths and Russian lessons, he has become much more confident in himself. Thank you hugely, the food parcels saved us.."- Anna and Artem*

*"I wanted to hugely thank the organizers, sponsors and benefactors for their help in providing food to many families in need during this hard time. During this hard time, your help was priceless. Thank you in particular to the sponsors who provided school supplies and shoes.."- V. Y. Moroz*

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# A very different year for Sunflower's camps

Sunflower managed to organise two camps when the quarantine was lifted last August. This year it was a huge effort and we all knew the camps were always going to be different. Despite the restrictions, the news came as a great relief for the many parents and young people who had been struggling to cope on their own during the lockdown. Physically separated from their friends and living on their own with no family support, the families and young orphanage-leavers found it extremely difficult to stay motivated and positive and their level of anxiety went off the scale.

After the isolation of the quarantine, everyone needed to be together, to share experiences and support each other. The day before the first summer camp for parents and pre-school children was scheduled, the Russian Health Agency received the authorities' recommendations on the free travel/movement and cohabitation of groups of no more than 20 people. Based on that, Sunflower formed two groups of 8 parents, 13 children and 4 young people. Sadly, the numbers were less than planned as some young people were not allowed to take time off from work.

Kostya found preparations to travel very stressful but he coped with his anxiety in a very practical way: "I have been in the camp before but this time it was very difficult to get ready because the train was really early. I was worried about sleeping in and not getting to the station on time. I even went to the train station to check how long it would take me to get to the station in time, taking into account the fact that I would have a heavy rucksack and would not be able to walk quickly in the metro to change trains. I was so nervous that I decided to invite my friend from the group to stay the night before at my house. In the end we both stayed up all night so we wouldn't miss the alarm, we were so worried. But we arrived at the station before anyone else!"

The camp for young people gives them a great insight of their strengths and resources, and here is how the camp helped Dima: "It's very important for me to come here. When I lived in the orphanage I



knew very little about the life I live now. The people teaching me there were too busy with their lives. They didn't notice me there, but here I am noticed. Thanks to our meetings I see how much I have to learn and I'm learning. Here I can see how parents communicate with their children and it's an experience for my future. Sooner or later I will be taking responsibilities and become a father too. At some point I realized that I am alone and I need to become independent, otherwise I could be lost. Here Sunflower teach me this. Yes, it is difficult. It's hard to recognise that I don't have family support. But I'm learning to deal with situations and grow. It's as if I'm learning here to pull weeds up that are strongly tied to my old habits and thoughts."

For the little children at the camp it has not been easy either. In the first few days, the children found it difficult to settle into the camp activities and games, many of them needed to bring back their friendships. Some families struggled to exercise as they had lost their fitness during the weeks of quarantine, some need longer recoveries from stress and loneliness. Sunflower's specialists reassured parents and helped them to balance their own needs and the needs of their children.

Because of the pandemic, our families and young people face more challenges without family support. We're proud of the progress they have made addressing their fears, anxiety and practical difficulties. The camp is one more milestone on their way to becoming truly independent.

**Thank you for helping us to support orphanage-leavers in these difficult times.**

# Signs of hope for Mkurnali

Over the last six months Mkurnali has had its ups and downs in trying to reestablish life under the 'new normal' and continue their own small businesses like cartridge refilling, car mechanic services and silver enamel production.

These are the main income generating work projects for Mkurnali's current residents. The pandemic hit them hard – the young people's income fell to less than 50% in the months after the lockdown and with a new surge of cases in Georgia the young people's earnings continue to decrease.

The day-to-day work at the shelter temporarily fell onto Jemal, Nino's assistant after Nino became a sole carer for her brother, who was diagnosed with cancer. Thankfully the legal programme funded by St Gregory's continues -Mkurnali's lawyer Inga has been providing legal assistance in online court hearings .

To help Mkurnali get through the tough last months George Guest and his group of helpers responded swiftly to our appeal last July which raised over £2,000.

This amount was sent towards buying special apparatus for moulds for enamel making and helping Vanya (one of Mkurnali's current residents) to establish an online business shop for mobile phone

accessories which is already showing signs of success. Vania plans to give employment to two apprentices at Mkurnali. Other plans include buying a 3D printer, repairing the kitchen ceiling and replacing kitchen units. Obviously there was a shortage of means and to support Mkurnali, we have just held our first online fundraising event: a wine tasting which raised nearly £4,000 and was a big success!

Our event was organised thanks to the support of Julius Baer, the British-Georgian Chamber of Commerce, Lagvinari and Badagoni wineries which provided wonderful Georgian wine for free, the UK's distributor of Borjomi water (complimentary bottles of Borjomi) and Royal Leerdam (free glassware). Silent auction lots were provided by Kodala toys, Little Georgia restaurant in Islington, and Royal Leerdam. We are also grateful to our volunteers who delivered wine for free across the UK – we wouldn't have been able to have held this event without their help.

We are delighted that H.E. the Ambassador of Georgia to the UK, Sophie Katsarava, was the key speaker at our event and we are most grateful for her support. We also send our big thanks to our presenters: Lizzy Unite and Lizzy Kelly at Marks and Spencer, Dr Eko Glonti, the owner of Lagvinari winery and Mako Abashidze, the founder and director of the British-Georgian Chamber of Commerce.



The feeling of community made this event possible despite all the restrictions – all proceeds from this event will go to help Mkunali put their plans into practice and continue their inspirational work to help the homeless in their care.

The image shows some of those who attended, and plenty of smiling faces. We hope to have further online events in the future.

**Watch this space!**

# News in brief

**New Treasurer – Yulia Mesotitsch** became our new Treasurer and will succeed Eddy Quah in this role from January 2021. Russian by origin, Yulia has an MSc in Economics (University of Hohenheim, Germany) and over 10 years' experience within the financial sector and worked in Russia and Germany. While volunteering for St Gregory's Yulia is also studying towards her ACCA Qualification. Yulia says: 'I am very excited about this job and am happy to get appointed as the new Treasurer. It is such a great chance to work with a wonderful team.' We all wish Yulia well in her new role!

**Retirements: Sebastian Coventry**, our longest-standing Director retired on the 1<sup>st</sup> December.

He was the guiding hand in implementing and organising the container programme in the early days of the Foundation. The container programme of sending clothing and other essentials was the most urgently required help in the former Soviet Union and was one of the key things that put St Gregory's on the map. Many thanks to Sebastian for the work he has put in over so many years.

**Eddy Quah**, our current Treasurer, will be leaving St Gregory's at the end of 2020. Eddy has given us a much more professional accounting system, put our Financial reporting on a professional footing and transferred our financial affairs onto QuickBooks. He is now pursuing his career in line with his interest in wellbeing and resiliency coaching and we wish him well!

## **New partnerships**

Two new partnerships with Help Impact and Julius Baer have brought a sizeable boost to our funds and projects: thanks to the £13,000 co-funding of Help Impact, we were able to provide stability of funds towards the work of the Deaf Club, the A-tech project (both in St Petersburg and Moscow) and Sunflower's programme 'My tomorrow' for orphanage-leavers. Julius Baer contributed £10,000 to cover the expenses of St Gregory's current and future fundraising events.

## **Books for Sunflower**

Sunflower's practical guidance on work with foster families has been invaluable for the local specialists in St Petersburg and the region. To help them expand Sunflower's expertise across Russia, St Gregory's purchased the translation rights for two e-books: '*The Attachment Handbook*' and '*Attachment, Trauma and Resilience*', both books are from the renowned UK agency Coram Baaf. Both books will be translated into Russian to help over 100 local Russian trainers and trainees. This is a very special case as this investment can deliver a huge impact because of the lack of materials in Russia.

## **Didn't they do well!**

Despite ever-changing restrictions, the Chester Cathedral group of supporters raised over £450 for Kondopoga's food parcels for families in need. This is a much appreciated donation, especially considering that Jane Jones and her group have only had one proper event this year, the pancake lunch. The rest they made on the sale of jams, chutneys and marmalades, and big thanks must go to Lyn Barritt, Caroline Dennis, Val Hamill and Penny Allen for their contribution to that figure. They also sold plants in the summer (thanks again to Caroline) and raised funds through eBay for donated items (including a rocking horse!)

**Thank you for your support  
in this extraordinary year!**

**We hope everyone has the best Christmas and New Year they can have given the restrictions (which are changing by the minute!). Take care and keep in touch with each other.**

**Very best wishes and big thanks for all your support – from us all at St Gregory's and our children, families and partners in Russia and Georgia.**

# 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](http://stgregorysfoundation.org.uk) or send a cheque payable to

The St Gregory's Foundation to:  
Yulia Mesotitsch, 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](http://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:

**Yulia Mesotitsch, Treasurer**

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

#### For more information or volunteer opportunities contact:

**Julia Ashmore, Executive Secretary**

By the address above.

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### SGF Christmas cards – last chance to buy!



Don't miss your chance to buy our Christmas cards while stocks last. They cost £5 per pack of 10. Two remaining designs contain Christmas greetings in English and Russian.

Nativity cards, pack of 10, 155 x108 mm, envelopes included.



Russian Forest, pack of 10, 174 x118 mm. envelopes included.

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](http://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.**

As our presence online becomes more and more active, we would like to ask you if **you would like to see a St Gregory's online shop starting next year?** Get in touch and let us know what items you might be interested in? In the meantime you can raise funds on Ebay or Amazon!

**Ebay:** 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!

**FOLLOW US on: [www.stgregorysfoundation.org.uk](http://www.stgregorysfoundation.org.uk)**

