



# St Gregory's Foundation

*Helping vulnerable children and families in Eastern Europe*



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## SUMMER CAMP RESTORATION STARTS

The lights are back on at Sunflower's dacha. This is the venue, deep in the countryside, for transformative summer camps for orphanage leavers and their children.

Last year, a glitch at a nearby electric sub-station took out their electrics and set fire to their dining room. Getting the lights back on is the first major step in their restoration programme, which we are helping to fund.

As you can see in the photo above, there is still much to do. Volunteers will return to the site in early May to rebuild the dining area and make it ready for this summer's camps.

There's still time for you to help replace equipment lost in the fire.



### Can you help?

Our colleagues have saved enough to buy essential kitchen equipment. They still need **£430** to transport this equipment, **£175** to transport volunteers, and **£255** to feed them during the work camp. **Donate online at [stgregorysfoundation.org.uk](https://stgregorysfoundation.org.uk) or send a cheque (see page 7).**





## VIKA'S STORY

In some ways, Vika is not typical of the young people that Sunflower help. She is actually an orphan - her mother died when she was 16 - and she is living in an institution until the paperwork is completed on the flat she is entitled to.

The majority of the young people in these institutions are there because their parents were not capable of looking after them. Sunflower has also recently started accepting young people who have grown up in foster care or an adoptive family onto its programme. What they all have in common is an experience of trauma. They are all alone in the world, without family to guide or support them.

Vika explains something of what life has been like:

"I have lived all my life in St Petersburg. Me and Ilya are twins. I ended up in a children's home after the authorities turned up at home. We had a lot to deal with in our life, we were

hiding from the pandemic, there wasn't any money then, we often moved around, we lived in Krasnogorodsk near Pskov, where Mama got ill and died. Then Dad (she calls her step-father dad) started drinking. It was scary. It was a good thing that we ended up in a children's home, there we get all our benefits, and they've even shown us a flat in our own district. That's some kind of luck."

Vika is carrying a lot of responsibility. She worries very much about her brother, who she says is depressed. She can't imagine life without him. She finds it difficult and frightening to think about the future.

Vika is really benefiting from Sunflower's individual counselling. It doesn't just allow her to get things off her chest, but to put the events of her life in order and to think about them clearly and calmly. She also goes to the group meetings once a month.

### CHANGE OF CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS FROM 01.05.2024

Please be advised that all correspondence and cheques made payable to The St Gregory's Foundation should be forwarded to the following address:

Vivian Wright, SGF, c/o Flat 2, Effingham Lodge  
Surbiton Crescent, Kingston upon Thames, KT1 2LN



## NEWS FROM MKURNALI'S SHELTER

We are very much looking forward to meeting Mkurnali's residents during the supporters' trip to Tbilisi this summer. We will meet some longstanding members of the community, like Jemal (once a beneficiary and now Nino's right hand man). We will also meet some new residents, like Luisa, whose story we tell today.

Luisa is an Azerbaijani Kurd and she came to Georgia with her mother and her brothers and sisters when she was a child. The family earned their living by begging and petty theft, but Luisa ran away. She appealed for help so she could study and lead a normal life. First she lived in an orphanage and then in foster care in a town some 200km from Tbilisi.

From there, Luisa's life took several twists and turns before she ended up at Mkurnali. Aged 17, she travelled to Tbilisi hoping to take up promised work as a model. When this didn't materialise, she ended up living on the streets. The authorities took her to live at another charity's shelter, where she met a boy and fell in love. He was also an Azerbaijani Kurd.

Luisa went to live with his family and became pregnant. Sadly, the family mistreated her, partly because she is a Christian and wouldn't change her faith at their demand. She couldn't

afford to see a gynaecologist. When life became unbearable, she turned again to the charity who had housed her before, and their mother and baby shelter. They arranged pregnancy care for her, but tragically, the baby was very underdeveloped and it was clear that it would not survive.

Unable to return to the mother and baby shelter without a baby, Luisa faced a return to the streets. Fortunately, Luisa is good at asking for help. She contacted the orphanage she had lived in, and they put her in touch with Mkurnali. She was able to go straight from the hospital to Mkurnali, where she was given a warm welcome by the other residents. Now she has a chance to start building a more stable future.

Luisa's chaotic and traumatic past is not unusual among Mkurnali's residents. So, it is not surprising that the children living there need extra help with their school work.

Nino has been helping Christina and Cecily learn their times tables and their grammar. Jamal and Lyuba have also attended some parenting classes run by a friend of Nino's so they can learn new ways to support their children. They found it very helpful.



## A VISIT TO THE WISH CENTRE

The journey from Chisinau to Călărași was just over an hour to The Wish Centre for disabled and autistic children and youths. This centre is a beacon for many local families who are raising children with special needs. Currently it is the only place in the region they can turn to for help and guidance.

Eugenia, who is just over 30, saw her life take a dramatic turn a decade ago when her sister lost her parental rights, and Eugenia found herself looking after her niece Ana, a baby with Down syndrome.

"I was at a loss for what to do or where to turn, having my own infant daughter. Then I learned of this Centre—it became our lifeline. Since 2017, we've been regulars, coming in twice a week, and luckily, we live close by. Ana adores it here and really looks forward to her sessions with the speech therapist. For all of us, her progress is evident—she's been accepted into a mainstream school."

As I speak with Eugenia, the therapy session concludes, and a fresh wave of children bursts into the wide hallway, for playtime. Samuel, always to be found with a book, is at the heart of the activity. At 8 years old, he lives with Down syndrome and associated heart problems. Samuel is one of Viorica's four children; Viorica is 35 and she is a volunteer at the Wish:

"For years, we searched for a kindergarten and school where Samuel would be treated like any other child. Yet, we were constantly told 'your child 'isn't capable'. Accepting his diagnosis was also a long struggle. However, after visiting specialists at The Wish and undergoing several therapy sessions, Samuel began to recognise colours and pronounce words. His love for reading and playing has grown, and with it, his confidence. I believe in my son's progress, and I cannot imagine our future without this Centre."

Viorica's family is one of the hundreds facing daily struggles due to insufficient community support. Children with special needs often face neglect or indifference, and their status remains low throughout Moldova. In the Călărași district alone, official records show 353 disabled children under 18 requiring constant care. Most are confined to their homes, isolated from their peers.

The Centre's team has shared evidence of the critical need for their services in Călărași, highlighting the shortage of qualified specialists, social services, and rehabilitation centres. There is a glaring lack of support and funding at all levels to meet the needs of these children. The rural areas lack the infrastructure necessary for young people's successful integration into society. Issues like delayed diagnoses, referrals, dysfunctional families, parents' fears of institutionalisation, and low disability awareness persist. These issues have lasted for decades in Moldova, rooted in Soviet-era attitudes.

Nonetheless, the tide is slowly turning, thanks to the efforts of parents and NGOs leading the charge to support families of children with special needs. The Wish Centre, housed in a repurposed private residence, was established in 2001 by parents of a child with cerebral palsy who chose not to send their child to a boarding school. Instead, they provided home education, followed by higher education in the Netherlands, leading to his success as an IT specialist.

This year, with St Gregory's grant, The Wish is offering tailored therapy and education programmes for 18 children with Down syndrome, autism spectrum disorders, and speech delays. We're aiming at enhancing the children's communication, literacy and life skills, as well as their physical endurance and co-ordination..

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Crucially, this project also fosters a supportive community for families to forge friendships and gain confidence. Natalya, mother to eight-year-old Adelina who has Down syndrome and a heart condition, recounts her journey from denial and depression to finding assistance and understanding at The Wish. Here, Adelina has started articulating sounds and learning the alphabet, thanks to the dedication of exceptional specialists.

Natalya and other parents express profound thanks to all who support The Wish and the futures it shapes.

Currently operating at half capacity due to funding shortages, The Wish is unable to serve many families who could benefit from its therapies. Our goal is to extend support to more families, especially those in remote villages.

Your assistance will make this possible.

## OUR FINANCES



SHIHO PREVOST,  
ST GREGORY'S ACCOUNTANT

We have ended 2023 in a good financial position despite the year being another challenging one due to the war in Ukraine and the subsequent economic crisis. We were able to support all the projects without drawing on our reserves.

Key highlights from 2023 were:

- A surplus of £36,558 which is a positive outcome compared to a forecasted deficit.
- Income totalled £155,598.
- Donations at £130,491 accounted for 84% of our annual income.
- Reserves have been wisely invested to deliver £16,751 dividends/interest for the year.
- Expenditures totalled £119,040.
- Charitable project and activity costs were as expected at £80,754.

We are pleased to report that our new projects in Moldova, launched in 2023, have attracted new funding sources.

Two substantial legacies have enormously helped provide a considerable boost to our general funds as regular fundraising for our Russian projects has notably decreased. This has allowed us to maintain stable funding of our partner projects.

Thank you to all of you who have helped us make our work possible. Please continue to support St Gregory's Foundation as every £ counts!

| What we received                   | 2023<br>unrestricted<br>funds, £ | 2022<br>total funds, £ |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| Donations & Legacies               | 130,491                          | 95,797                 |
| Other trading activities           | 8,356                            | 30,169                 |
| Investments                        | 16,751                           | 15,677                 |
| Total income                       | 155,598                          | 141,643                |
| What we spent                      | Year to 31.12.2023               | Year to 31.12.2022     |
| Fundraising                        | 29,982                           | 36,973                 |
| Direct charitable expenditure      | 80,754                           | 84,626                 |
| Governance costs                   | 8,304                            | 14,382                 |
| Total spent                        | 119,040                          | 135,981                |
| <b>Total funds brought forward</b> | 473,879                          | 515,007                |
| <b>Total funds carried forward</b> | 517,657                          | 473,879                |

## NEWS IN BRIEF



### RETIREMENT OF SGF ACTING TREASURER

Vivian Wright, our long-standing Director and Acting Treasurer, will be retiring at the Annual General Meeting on September 16th. Her invaluable support has been crucial for our charity's operations and our ongoing commitment to assisting hundreds of children and families from Georgia, Russia, Moldova, and Ukraine. We extend our heartfelt wishes for a joyful retirement to Vivian and remain very grateful for her unwavering dedication and assistance to SGF.

As we navigate this period of transition, we are in search of a new volunteer Director. If you know someone who would be a perfect fit, or if you are interested in taking on the role yourself, please refer to the vacancy details on our website.

[stgregorysfoundation.org.uk/get-involved/become-a-trustee/](http://stgregorysfoundation.org.uk/get-involved/become-a-trustee/)

### GEORGE'S AND SHIRLEY'S LEGACY

Your legacy can serve as a lifeline for our projects. We have been incredibly blessed to receive two amazing legacy gifts from George and Shirley Guest, now deceased. Mkurnali was George's charity of choice; he and his supporters raised thousands of pounds to aid in the rehabilitation of young, formerly homeless teenagers and street youths in Tbilisi, Georgia. His legacy will make a lasting impact, as will Shirley's generous contribution to the families of orphanage leavers in St. Petersburg. We are deeply thankful.

### RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT BANS GLOBAL GIVING

For many years now we have worked with Global Giving. This online fundraising platform has helped us find new supporters from around the world.

Many of you will also have taken part in their matching campaigns, when they add a bonus to your donations. So, it is with sadness that we learned that Global Giving has been declared undesirable by the Russian Government - a sign of the difficult climate for many NGOs in Russia today.

We are no longer able to fundraise for Russia on Global Giving. However, in July and December there will be opportunities to have donations to Mkurnali and The Wish matched. Sign up to our email bulletin or follow us on social media if you'd like to know more.

### MAKING BOOKS ACCESSIBLE



If you have young children in your life, you have probably come across the "That's not my" series of tactile books. The chances are you won't have seen them in this format.

This spring, our colleagues at Communication Space have been leading workshops on how to adapt books for those with multiple disabilities. The changes may be as simple as making pages easier to turn, or they might involve translating text into the PECS language of symbols used by some non-verbal people. As ever, the adaptations are simple, achievable and tailored to the specific needs of each person.

28 professionals and parents took part in the course and between them they made more than 50 adapted books.

# HOW YOUR DONATIONS HELP

- £10 will contribute towards the expenses of one volunteer helping restore Sunflower's summer camp
- £16 will pay a psychologist/teacher for an afternoon session with disabled children in rural Moldova
- £25 will buy toys used to teach methods of adapting them for use by children with learning difficulties
- £115 will pay for Mkurnali's lawyer to defend one vulnerable young person through an average case.

## MAKE A ONE-OFF DONATION

Donate online at  
**StGregorysFoundation.org.uk**  
 or  
 send a cheque payable to  
 The St Gregory's Foundation to:  
 Vivian Wright, SGF  
 c/o Flat 2, Effingham Lodge, Surbiton Crescent  
 Kingston upon Thames, KT1 2LN

## MAKE A REGULAR DONATION

Donate online at  
**StGregorysFoundation.org.uk**  
 or  
 return this standing order form to SGF

To the manager of ..... bank  
 Bank address: .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 Account name: .....  
 Account No. ....  
 Sort Code: .....

Please pay into the account of the St Gregory's Foundation, Royal Bank of Scotland  
 Acc. 12348109 Sort Code: 16-12-53  
 the sum of £..... starting on ..... (date)  
 and continuing on the same day  
 monthly/quarterly/annually\* until further  
 notice. This replaces any existing order in  
 favour of St Gregory's Foundation.

Name: .....

Date: .....

Signature: .....

## KEEP IN TOUCH

- I wish to become a member of St Gregory's Foundation and enclose my annual subscription of £30 (waged)/£20 (unwaged).
- I wish to receive the newsletter by post
- I wish to receive news by e-mail

## MY DETAILS AND CONSENT

Name:  
 Address:  
  
 Postcode:  
 Phone:  
 E-mail:  
 Signature:

## PLEASE *giftaid* YOUR DONATION

- I wish to gift aid my donation of £..... to St Gregory's Foundation (single donation)
- I wish to gift aid my donation of £....., and donations I make in the future and any donations I have made in the past 4 years to St Gregory's Foundation (multiple donations)

I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less income tax and/or capital gains tax than the gift aid claimed on all my donations in any tax year, it is my responsibility to pay the difference.

## What do we do?

St Gregory's Foundation supports local charities in Eastern Europe to tackle poverty and social insecurity facing children, teenagers, parents and carers. Our projects address the root causes of disadvantage by putting families before institutions, strengthening a sense of responsibility and providing opportunities for vulnerable people to fulfil their potential. Our work encourages local initiatives and makes our beneficiaries active participants in improving their own lives.

We're currently looking for a volunteer Director. Do you know a suitable candidate or perhaps you would like to step in? The current vacancy is listed on our website: [stgregorysfoundation.org.uk/get-involved/become-a-trustee/](http://stgregorysfoundation.org.uk/get-involved/become-a-trustee/)

## CONTACTS

### Please send donations to:

Vivian Wright, Acting Treasurer  
c/o Flat 2, Effingham Lodge  
Surbiton Crescent  
Kingston upon Thames,  
KT1 2LN

### For info and volunteering:

Julia Ashmore, Executive Secretary  
Tel: 0203372 4992  
[julia@stgregorysfoundation.org.uk](mailto:julia@stgregorysfoundation.org.uk)

### Online shop queries?

[shop@stgregorysfoundation.org.uk](mailto:shop@stgregorysfoundation.org.uk)

### SGF Directors:

- Nicholas Kolarz, Chair
- Vivian Wright, Acting Treasurer
- Tania Illingworth
- Jane Jones
- Luke Montague OBE
- Simon Jennings

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## Early bird offer on cards



It's not too early to order your Christmas cards. Take advantage of our 20% offer and buy packs of 10 for £4.

[shop.stgregorysfoundation.org.uk](http://shop.stgregorysfoundation.org.uk)