

## Press Release

The Lions Clubs of District 105SE 2009 Shoebox Appeal in partnership with Lions Belarus Trust.

Support for the families and children of Belarus affected by the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Station Disaster 23 years ago.

The Gomel Region of Belarus which is in the far South East Corner of the country bordering the Ukraine is only 100km from Chernobyl. The radioactive cloud formed by the explosion 23 years ago drifted over Belarus and in particular the Gomel Region and was encouraged to deposit its contents of radioactive dust there rather than drift further north and east towards Moscow and further afield. As a result the land became heavily irradiated and impossible to live on and everyone was forced to leave their homes.

Many 1000's of families and complete communities were driven off their land where they lived a very basic rural life for generations and brought to live in the outskirts of the city of Gomel and other cities throughout Belarus without work and without the ability to cope with Urban life. A totally alien existence which some embraced but many were driven to despair and many became very ill. Vodka is very cheap and easy to drown your desperation with.

Twenty three years on the Children we now support were born into these families in the City and its suburbs. Their parents have illnesses related to the Chernobyl fallout as do many of the children and so the Orphanages and Schools which we support specialise in looking after those children with many challenging conditions such as sight problems, learning difficulties, blood disorders, leukaemia, thyroid problems etc. etc

Typically Orphanages in Gomel Region each cater for about 150 to 200 children who live and learn there 7 days a week from the age of 4 to 16 or 18 depending on the establishment. These Orphans are both genuine orphans as we understand the term (life expectancy is very low) or social orphans created by the fact that their parents are incapable for many reasons of looking after them.

This year's shoebox appeal will touch many hundreds of children and families through the Chernobyl Children's Charity a Gomel based Charity set up by the State to help these children. Members of Gomel Lions Club work closely with the Charity. The Charity accepts delivery of our Lorry load of shoeboxes and parcels bulk goods and distributes it over a period of a couple of months.

Last year the load included about 175 personally addressed cases of goods and shoeboxes to about 100 individual addresses which are based in Schools, Orphanages, Kindergartens (2 of them still operating in the contaminated zone). Goods were sent to Large destitute family groups, Single Parent family groups and specialist goods such as a request for English language books to School No.71 (The Secondary School specialising in languages). Some technical books were also sent as requested by the Ophthalmologist at School 27 where we have already set up a Lions Centre of Excellence for Children's Eye Disorders.

When the lorry left the warehouse in September the load was nearly 9000Kg with a calculated (S/H goods) value in the order of £16,000 and completely filled the 40 ft curtain sided trailer. True new value in the order of £50,000 at least.

It included 28 S/H checked and refurbished Computers and laptops plus computer spares and printers, Toiletries, Toys, Clothing, Canned Food, Paper, Books, Stationery, Bicycles, Hand Tools and a miscellany of other items of everyday life, and they will be overjoyed to receive them.

We as the organisers of the annual event now in its ninth year are delighted at the continued success and thank everyone who plays any part in its operation from packers, sorters and lorry loaders, children and schools who donate shoeboxes, Clubs who purchase goods to make up both bulk supplies and shoeboxes, those clubs and individuals who donate both time, expertise (in the case of the computers) and money to the project and last but not least the Gateway Project, Rushenden Road, Queenborough, Sheppey, in Kent who donated a massive area of their premises and the use of their Fork Lift Truck and a driver for loading day and generally could not have been more helpful.

The Goods arrived at the Belarus Border about 10 days later and after some checking proceeded to a bonded warehouse in the City of Gomel where the Belarussian Children's Charity in Gomel "Heritage of Chernobyl" are our contact and distribution agents.

The Charity ladies look after everything there for us and there are also links with the new Gomel Lions Club

They themselves have to rent the bonded warehouse for which we send out about 400 euros and they use the army or local labour to unload the lorry.

The process of checking the goods and release by the Belarussian Customs Authorities can sometimes take a few weeks and sometimes a few months. In 2008 it was the latter, with detailed investigation of many items, categorising of all goods into over 45 different categories, the translation of labels into the local language and approval from higher authorities to release the goods to those who desperately need it.

Eventually we understand that this process was completed in time for the goods to be distributed before Christmas 2008.

We will be repeating the exercise in 2009 learning from the problems of 2008 and will begin accepting goods in July. One item we will not be repeating is foodstuffs of any kind. The canned food sent in 2008 appears to have caused a delay of at least 6 weeks in the distribution.

Monetary Donations to the LIONS BELARUS TRUST DISTRICT 105SE Registered Charity number 1112811 would assist in the transportation of the goods and also the work which the trust can do in the Gomel region.

We have several on-going projects such as the severely leaking roof of a large orphanage housing 200 children in a village about a 1 hour drive from Gomel where the roofing materials are over 30 years old and are simply one layer of perished bitumen felt. Water runs down the walls of the upper floor rooms endangering the health of the children living there in constantly damp or wet conditions. Estimated cost 50,000 to 60.000 Euros.

Another orphanage of a similar size is unsafe and needs new fire doors on its many corridors. There are many other projects with which we could proceed if we had sufficient funds to do so. Estimated cost 8,000 Euros.

Your generosity would be appreciated.

PCC Lion Chris Iles

Lion Mike Shaw

Special Projects Chairman

Warehouse Manager