

INTRODUCTION TO “KITEZH” DIMITRY MOROZOV’S BOOK ABOUT THE WORK OF KITEZH CHILDREN’S COMMUNITY, RUSSIA published in Russia, 2004. ISBN 5-900891-25-9

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It is particularly rare these days to find leaders of educational or social initiatives writing about their work while they are actually doing it. Somehow the exacting task of sustaining hands on work day in, day out with young people and those who teach and care for them precludes any time for putting down on paper exactly what is happening. By defying this trend Dimitry Morozov joins the small band of practitioner authors which exist in the field of working with disturbed and damaged children in need of a therapeutic solution to their difficulties.

Kitezh deserves to be written about. In its eleven years so far several enthusiastic reports have appeared in the foreign press and in Russia too. Like the mystical city in old Russian legend after which it is named Kitezh Children’s Community does indeed symbolise the potential dawn of a new age in addressing the needs of Russia’s orphan children and there are now the first welcome signs that those responsible for shaping national policy may be taking an active interest.

What is the special nature of the approach practiced by Morozov and those who have come to join him at Kitezh? It is, firstly, the de institutionalizing of child care. Kitezh does not warehouse children for the convenience of the authorities; it is a truly child centred village of supported foster families where flourish a rigorous education programme together with a group and individual therapeutic processes designed to empower the most disempowered of children and have them feeling that, at last, they have reached a place where they are safe, valued and where life, with all its burdens, can also embrace the freedom to play and have fun.

At Kitezh, the unlovable are loved and outrageous behaviour learned on the streets of Russia’s towns and cities because there was no other option is tolerated, worked with and turned around. If this sounds simplistic to some ears then I am sorry but that is what happens there with very few exceptions. The very process of empowerment to which I referred becomes the child’s prime tool in marking his recovery as he learns to own the process of his own healing and growth. The foster family he has joined is not ‘administered’ from a distant social services office but supported and nourished on an hour by hour basis, year round, by others carrying out the same role for other children and enhanced by the dynamic presence of their natural children whose contribution to the process cannot be under stated.

Here the novice foster parent is taught by the experience of those who have practised the art for several years. This though has never been enough for Kitezh. Morosov has sought actively the experience of social innovators and practitioners from abroad, invited them to Kitezh to observe freely, comment and suggest ways forward in the light of their extensive work with similarly dysfunctional children. Then, with a cool dispassionate professionalism and loyal to his first principles over which he has laboured hard to determine, he and his colleagues have selectively transposed this wisdom into the Russian context and made it work for Kitezh.

Kitezh is now an international associate of the Charterhouse Group of therapeutic communities, UK with a strong list of standards of care and education to look to for support. The Group conference of 2003, held in England, first read of and then heard from Morosov and one other community from Denmark and proposed Kitezh be admitted to membership. This proposal was endorsed by the whole Charterhouse Group later the same year thereby setting up a process by which Kitezh adults can engage in useful exchanges of visits, current ideas and practice with some of the most successful organisations working therapeutically over many years with troubled children. This is already happening.

Following several advisory missions over ten years to Russian Ministries, regional authorities and individual children's houses and schools, it has been my joy and privilege over the last five years to witness and perhaps contribute to the development of this remarkable community. It is about to embark on yet another big step; the foundation of a second village. This challenge will harness every skill the people at Kitezhd have learned to date. The courage they have demonstrated in getting this far in a sometimes sceptical society will serve them well. They now have tangible support for their innovative work from within Russia and in time will, I very much hope, make some positive professional impact on thinking and practice throughout the whole country. This book will help in making the journey.