

Russian Children's Relief Fund  
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DATE: April 23, 2001  
TO: YANK BARRY / GLOBAL VILLAGE CHAMPIONS FOUNDATION  
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FROM: GORDON P. STULA

Total number of pages: TWO (2)

Dear Yank:

Enclosed please find a most recent US. News & World Report article, which tells about the uniquely Russian tragedy where abandoned newborns of HIV positive women are socially ostracized for the first three years of their lives. These babies are NOT HIV positive and are still institutionalized and ignored for the first 3 years!

Moscow's infectious Diseases Hospital No. 2 (from this article) is one of our benefactor institutions due to its enormous children's ward. So I am happy to be able put a face and a story to a name of one of GVCF's donor recipients. Let your donors know that their contributions directly help those unfortunate children that are still too young to help themselves.

Way to go Global Village Champions Foundation!!!

Best regards,  
RUSSIAN CHILDREN'S RELIEF FUND, INC.



Gordon P. Stula

Enclosure

**World Report**



Left at the hospital where they were born: One child is being treated for chickenpox.  
"We take care of the body, but we turn out imbeciles."

**Not good enough, even for the orphanages**

*No one wants babies of HIV-positive mothers*

**By Masha Gessen**

MOSCOW—One morning recently, little Tanya was given a red dress and blue hose to wear. She cried until the blue stockings were exchanged for red ones; She likes to wear matching outfits. She cannot name her colors, though. *Мне не нравятся цвета, но я люблю красные.* She has two weeks to go until her third birthday, but she lacks the motor skills normal for her age: She cannot throw a ball or pull a toy wagon, much less put together a simple puzzle.

Tanya suffers from no mental or physical disability. And she has had decent nutrition and good medical care all her life. But she has never seen a ball, a wagon, or a television cartoon, and no one has ever tried to teach her colors or numbers. She was born and still lives in Moscow's Infectious Diseases Hospital No.2. She has been outside just once, when she was moved from one ward to another.

Tanya's mother, who abandoned the girl at birth, was HIV positive. Tanya herself does not have the virus, but her mother's illness condemned the girl to spending the first three years of her life at a hospital.

She is one of hundreds of young children all over Russia who are confined to hospital rooms or, if they are lucky, to special nursery schools and baby homes for the children of HIV-positive women.

Russia's HIV epidemic has so far hit almost exclusively young drug users. About a quarter of all women between the ages of 18 and 22 the most likely age for a Russian woman to bear her first child. Yevgeni Voronin, the country's leading expert on children and HIV and the chief doctor of the St. Petersburg's Republican Infectious Diseases Hospital, where children from all over the country are treated, estimates that 50,000 HIV-positive women will give birth by the year 2005. If the current trend continues, 1 of 4 newborns will be abandoned - making for over 12,000 tiny untouchables.

Segregated. Russian health authorities long ago opted for segregating HIV-positive patients. Rather than receive treatment in regular hospitals, they are required to go to specialized AIDS centers for everything from cold treatments to dental care. Pregnant women are tested for HIV on a mandatory basis, and, if they are positive, they have to receive prenatal counseling and medical care at AIDS centers.

Most of them are counseled to have abortions: In Moscow alone, last year nearly half of the women referred to the AIDS center had abortions, Doctors generally assume that HIV-positive women, most of whom use hard drugs, will be unable to care for their children. If they decide against abortion, women are encouraged to give up their babies to the state.

But the state cannot care for these children either. Orphanages refuse to accept the children unless doctors can guarantee that they are HIV negative. In fact, in the absence of perinatal anti-HIV treatment, about 75 percent of all babies of HIV-positive women are born without the virus - while the treatment, available in some cities in Russia, guarantees a nearly 100 percent rate of HIV-free births. But children can retain their mothers' antibodies to HIV as late as age 3, which means they test positive on traditional antibody tests. A more sophisticated method called determine the presence or absence of the virus in the blood, but Russian doctors do not consider that sufficient evidence. So children stay in the hospitals.

Some cities have tried to improve the toddlers' lot Russia's westernmost region, Kaliningrad, hit by the HIV epidemic before the rest of the country, has created an entire system, complete with a separate birthing ward for HIV-positive women and a separate nursery school for their children. The Moscow hospital, now home to 40 abandoned babies and toddlers, is building its own orphanage. The hospital in St. Petersburg has built a playground and tried to hire teachers for its 30 abandoned kids, but, says a nurse, "They are afraid of the very word AIDS," and the staff turnover rate is brisk. After the children -turn 3, they are handed over to the general orphanage system. By this time they are at a desperate disadvantage, with little chance of catching up developmentally. "We take care of the body, but we turn out' imbeciles," Voronin states bluntly. Segregated now children like Tanya likely will grow up to be hopelessly ill-adjusted adults, all because the previous generation was too afraid to touch them when they were tiny.