

## Belarus Blog March 2019

Its time for another visit to Belarus. 21<sup>st</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> March 2019. On this visit are Kenny Turnbull (Coordinator) on his 15<sup>th</sup> visit along with 3 debutants Gracia Grant (mum of Dima and Stas, Lesley Spence (mum of Nastya) and David King (dad of Kira)

Our supplies have all been gathered and packed and we are on our way.

Day 1.

Early start with flight to Amsterdam, stopover then flight to Minsk.

Katia Boss and Dima drove us the 2.5 hours to Mogilev where we were met by the interpreters who had laid on a feast and champagne.

Thereafter the itinerary was tweaked and firmed up for the 8 days then we sorted out gift bags before retiring for an early night as we've ask been up since 0230hrs.

Tomorrow shall be breakfast then supermarket for supplies. Children visited thereafter.

Love this friendly country already!

Day2

Breakfast then off to supermarket for supplies for families.

Stopped at a beautiful RC church then off to Cherikof about an hour away.

First visit belonged to Nikita and Artum although Artum was away to the sanatorium health farm for 3 weeks respite as is normal if you live in contaminated areas. As ever, family very grateful for supplies and showed us round the house.

Next stop Tomonova in Klimovichi but 25km of Dead Zone to drive through first. The warning signs are now 100m from roadside so I had to walk across the Dead Zone to get to the sign!

Very eerie place.

In Tomonova we visited Aleona and Vasilisa and family. Vasilisa has her 1st visit to Scotland in June and is very excited. Aleona played the accordion for us (see video) then her and Dad showed us their pigs. Lovely family.

Final visit was to Dennis on way back to Mogilev. His Mum filled us up with amazing cakes and Belarussian potato pancakes.

Picked up Sascha for interpreters pay in Mogilev tonight. Quick change in hotel and we're all tired but looking forward to a meal and party with some of the interpreters to thank them for all their hard work.

DAY 3

Shopping then breakfast at the new Burger King with Kostya and Ollya before heading out to Godilova to see Nastya and Mum. Lots of coffee and cake.

Then round the corner to see Ercamo, Zarina and family.

Off to a solicitor in Bhykov to get some papers dined then straight on into the countryside to visit Dima and Stas.

Running late getting back to Mogilev so straight to interpreter Ira's house for s lovely dinner

with her parents.

Long walk back to hotel via war monuments and other sights.

Shattered but what a great day!

#### DAY 4

Big day today started with supply shopping then off to Godilova to visit Timothy and family. After that on to Bhykov to see Kira and family.

The afternoon was amazing with the August children party in the restaurant. The food was good and the interpreters did a great job organising and creating entertainment and games (evident in photos and video).

Finally in evening to Katia L house for fantastic food and hospitality.

We are so lucky that our amazing interpreters look after us so well.

We have all made new families on this trip.

#### DAY 5

Shopping then off to visit our resident artist Alexei with lots of home baking by Mama.

Bowling alley next stop for June Group children. Great food, dodgy bowling by adults while children thrashed us and then a bit of a disco...the video is a must see!!!

A little shopping in Mogalev after popping into the office and then to try and get some comfy trainers as my Achilles tendon playing up and some gifts for family.

Finally a fantastic dinner at interpreter Tania house.

Definitely an early night for us all after 2 kids parties in 2 days.

Tomorrow we have our private visits with our host children so each of us will write our own posts.

Night night.

#### DAY 6

Visit to Dima and Vicka two handicapped children we support. Also, absolutely best day ever for all of us having private visits with our little angels.

#### DAY 7

Shopping for 4 families before heading off to the outskirts of Bhykow.

First visit was Maxim and Mama and his pet gerbils.

Next stop Katia and Mama who had laid on a spread for us. We played with her puppy and saw the goats and ducks.

Back to Bhykow to see Alina Whelan and family. Alina gave us a dance concert before we ate her Babusha's cake and toured her grandfather's workshop to see his inventions.

Lunch with Lera and Lisa and Lisa Mama had cooked us a meal. And, BTW, can this woman bake a cake! By now I am like a child on blue M & Ms with all the sugar from cakes.

Last visit was to Alina Wells and family at their hostel. She has been competing in school Olympiad for Life Skills so has not had much time in her school holidays for relaxing. Back to hotel for freshening up before everyone off to Katia Markova for a fantastic dinner. I'm afraid I did not go as sprained Achilles meant I have been hobbling a bit so put feet up and rested with cake in hotel room instead.

However I did not completely miss out as the team returned with stuffed cabbage from Katia for me.

It is these kind thoughts and hospitality which is what makes Belarus a lovely country. It is the people.

A very busy and tiring day. Everyone ready for their beds.

Last full day tomorrow but we will have our host children with us and will spoil them rotten before crying into our vodka at the farewell/thank you party with interpreters in the evening.

Day 8

Visit to the hospital we help. This time we donated some busy boards and associated equipment for young children with muscle and motor difficulties.

Also visited New Nastya and New Vicka so they were more comfortable with us all before their first visit to Scotland. They both said that they loved being at the party, which was great to hear.

Shopping for gifts to take home then our host kids were brought to Mogilev. Last chance to see them so spoiled them rotten with soft play and burgers. Then we all got rather emotional with the goodbyes which we knew would be hardest. The evening was a quiet get together with the interpreters for a couple of drinks to thank them for their help and, more importantly, hospitality. Early night as leaving for airport at silly o'clock.

Day 9

Left hotel at silly o'clock.

All flights on time.

Great to get home to our UK families.

It was a wonderful experience in a lovely, friendly country. We were first timers and it was very emotional but we wouldn't have missed it for the World.

Thank you FOCC West Lothian, Helping Hands and all our supporters for making a difference to these children. And thank you BELARUS!