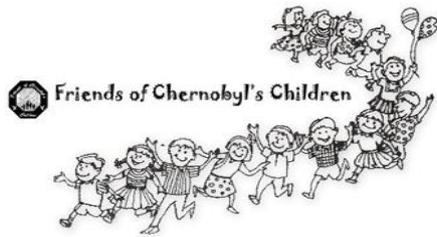


FOCC Edinburgh West – West Lothian



Daily Blog for the group visit ~ 14th Sept to 12th Oct, 2011

Day 1: Wed 14th Sept ~ Arrival & Meeting the Families

The children were all very sleepy after their long journey having travelled by bus from the Cherkov region to Minsk, flown to Gatwick and then travelled by minibus and car from Gatwick to Broxburn.

Fun Stuff: Watching our supposedly shy and scared new children facing their whole travelling adventure with so much courage.

Star of the day: Sasha Evans for cuddling and being a pillow for Angelina Cotton all the way from Gatwick to help with her travel sickness. Katia and Luda for delivering our children safely to us.

Day 2: Thu 15th Sept ~ Specsavers & Bathgate Dental Spa



The children met bright and early (8.15am) at Specsavers in Livingston where all 17 children plus Luda and Katia had their eyes tested. Luda, Kostya, Angelina, Dzianis and Dasha all required glasses and these were kindly donated by Specsavers. The children were spoilt once again with a gift voucher from Ted at Specsavers and we are very grateful for the care and generosity shown to the children.

After a lovely lunch of pizza and salad donated by Dasha's family the children headed to Bathgate Dental Spa where there were four dentists – Ian, Chris, Jim and Claire – along with their lovely nurses waiting to treat the children. Preventative work along with fillings and extractions were the order of the day. The children were completely unphased and the expertise and kindness of the

staff shone through. Once again, it was not Luda's day and she will be returning for treatment! We are extremely grateful to the entire team at Bathgate Dental Spa for giving the children such a positive experience.

Star of the day: Kostya who was very happy to have his two extractions saying that it was far less traumatic and painful than when Mama tried to extract them for him at home!

Day 3: Fri 16th Sept ~ Lessons, swimming and games in the hall

At last, the first full day of fun – but Luda had different ideas! The children all settled down into their new school routine and it was time for lessons for a couple of hours. After the mid-morning snack it was time to take the short walk to Broxburn swimming pool where all 17 excited kids had great fun splashing around in both the big and small swimming pools. The kids reluctantly left the fun of the swimming pool to return to the hall for lunch. The Sterrick family had certainly been busy making minestrone soup and lovely biscuits for lunch. Sadly, the children didn't bring good weather with them to Scotland so instead of playing



games in the park they spent some of the afternoon practicing for the concert and the rest of the time playing games in the hall.

Fun Stuff: Trying to find the children amongst all the inflatables squashed into the wee swimming pool.

Stars of the day: Dzianis Anderson for being so brave in the swimming pool.

Day 4 & 5: Sat & Sun 17th & 18th Sept ~ Weekend

First weekend with the host families and a chance for the children to experience our fabulous late summer weather! Still, it wasn't a complete wash out as Andrei had a great day out at Blair Drummond Safari Park where seeing the lions was a huge thrill, but it was the good old goats that got all of the food.

Pasha had time on his hands (see photo □) so he took Luda for her first visit to Edinburgh where she became queen for the day.



Day 6: Mon 19th Sept ~ Illieston Castle



The day started with lessons and a check of the all important weekend homework. Then it was into the minibus for the short ride to Illieston Castle just outside Broxburn. What a welcome we received from Nicholas and Yelena, the two boys and Anna a Russian Baboushka – our hosts for the day. Nicholas looking great in his kilt. Yelena very excitedly talking to the children in Russian. The flags were out for our arrival and toasted marshmallows, hot chocolate and warm apple sponge gave us much needed energy for the fun ahead. The children and adults were split into the red and green team. We were given a treasure map and we scampered around the castle grounds picking up letters in Russian which we had to bring back to the castle gate. The letters were then arranged to spell the word treasure. Points were awarded for the winning team and kept on the scoreboard.

The teams were then given a metal detector each and they were to search for coins along the grass verge of the drive. There were many excited faces as each child found a coin.

Next up was a relay race which included a line of Croquet, hockey round the cones and egg and spoon with real eggs. The children are very competitive and encouraged each other on to victory.





The funniest part of the day was the tug of war. It was to be best out of three. After a long pull the first contest was won. However during a very strenuous second contest the hose snapped in the middle sending both teams flying to the ground in fits of laughter. After regaining their composure it was on to the sack race and balloon race. All before lunch.

Nicholas and Yelena put on a fantastic Belarussian lunch for the children with Russian salad, cabbage, beetroot salad, sausages bread and of course cakes. There was a nice birthday cake for Masha and every child made a wish for her before singing happy birthday. The funniest wish being Pasha who wished her 15 boys and 15 girl children.

The afternoon was spent mainly indoors in the beautiful front room of the castle, with both teams putting on their own puppet show, then both doing a dance routine with all kinds of different hats on. X factor then followed with many acts. The pick of them was Sasha Sterrick singing and playing the piano, Sasha Evans singing and four of the boys breakdancing with Dzianis Rodger the star breakdancer, Yelena hosted a Scottish quiz in the style of Anne Robinson with Sasha Evans correctly answering that a haggis had 4 legs. Just at that point Nicholas spotted one running outside the window but unfortunately the children were not quick enough to see it.

The day was rounded off by a rough game of football before we had to say our thank yous and goodbyes to our brilliant hosts. The overall result of the team competition – would you believe it – a draw!

Fun Stuff: Had to be the look of disbelief then laughter on the childrens faces when the tug of war rope snapped.

Stars of the day: Masha the birthday girl, Dzianis the amazing breakdancer and of course our hosts

Day 7: Tue 20th Sept ~ Lessons, Concert Practice & Line Dancing

Back to earth with a bump, with a morning of school lessons, and an afternoon of concert practice followed by Line Dancing with Ann Evans. The MacGillvrays provided a lovely lunch of Hot Dogs and Apple Pie and Ice-cream which went down very well with the children. We were visited by Sandy and Louise Paton (potential new host parents) who told the children all about the fantastic British Waterways The Helix project which will transfer land between Falkirk and Grangemouth into a thriving new greenspace and will include the kelpies (two 30 metre high structures in the shape of horses heads). The children were also presented with The Helix Baseball Caps and T-Shirts. We also had a short visit by Mat, a photographer for the Edinburgh Evening News, who took pictures of Andrei Smith and Sash Sterrick in the church grounds.



Fun Stuff: Watching Dennis finding so many excuses not to sit down and do his school work!

Stars of the day: Angelina Grant for her wonderful dancing and helping to clear up at the end of the day. Sasha Sterrick and Andrei Smith for taking time out to get some wonderful photos for the Edinburgh Evening News article. Luda for being very brave and having 3 fillings at the dentist without any anaesthetic.



Day 8: Wed 21st Sept ~ BBQ at Burntisland



Perhaps not the best day weatherwise for a BBQ at the beach, but we all made the best of it and had a great time. On arriving at Burntisland we went straight to the beach to collect shells. As usual, a few of the children found it hard to control their enthusiasm on seeing the sea, and a few wet feet later we were ready to start the BBQ. We found a dry, quiet and sheltered spot in one of the tunnels leading onto the beach and had all 98 big sausages and 8 packets of mini sausages cooked and enthusiastically eaten in no time at all. Many thanks to Vion / Halls Foods for supplying our sausages. On the way home, for the full seaside trip experience, the children enjoyed a stick of seaside rock (kindly gifted by Bob and Lilian).

Back at the church we celebrated Sasha Evans's 10th birthday with a wee gift, cake, balloons and a rousing chorus of Happy Birthday.

Fun Stuff: Watching 98 sausages disappear in almost as many seconds!

Stars of the day: Angelina Cotton for helping to clean up after Sasha's birthday snacks and Chrystina Mckay for getting everyone to sign Sasha's birthday card. And finally, of course, Sasha Evans for reaching the grand old age of 10!



Day 9: Thu 22nd - Linlithgow Academy



Lessons to start the day before heading off to Linlithgow Academy where a warm welcome and lots of fun awaited us. First activity was a swim in the school pool where the children had lots of fun trying out all of the floats, swimming gloves and flippers. After swimming, a short break for a snack in the canteen and a chance to meet some of the Academy school children, was followed by a fantastic session in the Dance Studio with Lyn Hendry (who had also organised our visit). The children learned a brilliant dance routine and had lots of fun using the cheerleaders pom-poms! Next up was fun and games in the gymnasium where we played lots of ball games, Statues and Duck, Duck Goose! Just as exhaustion was setting in, a group of 4th year girls joined us and gave a dance display to the children ... the very routine that they had been learning

themselves in the Dance Studio. Not to be outdone, our children sang the girls a Belarussian song, and gave them a sneak preview of one of the routines that they are preparing for our farewell concert. A lovely lunch was next on the agenda (even the Academy school children said that the food was good!), and we had the chance to meet and talk with more of the Academy school children. Lunch was followed by meeting the Headmaster, David Mackenzie, and

being awarded with honorary Linlithgow Academy badges. All in all a terrific day out.

On returning to the church hall, the day was rounded off with concert practice, with some beautiful singing encouraged by Yelena, school lessons, and a wonderful story and origami display by Luda which had adults and children enthralled!



Fun Stuff: Dennis' habit of washing his hands after going to the loo was taken to a whole new level when he decided to have a shower instead ... fully clothed!

Stars of the day: Natasha for being so brave when the GP was checking her sore foot. Olya for her enthusiasm at the Academy Dance Studio and Dzianis for his fantastic break dancing. Nikita & Vadim for very nearly chatting up two of the 4th year girls (another 5 minutes and they'd have arranged their first dates) and of course Dennis for cleanliness above and beyond the call!



Day 10: Fri 23rd Sept ~ Lessons, Potter Around & Concert Prep



Today was a day that the boys in the group showed us their talents. Firstly at potter around where the world's best artists could be out shined with the Pen Holders that the children painted. The children had a great time with snacks being supplied and toys to play with after their masterpieces had been completed.

Back to Broxburn Church for a delicious lunch of Pasta and Bolognese, homemade scones, homemade damson jam and fresh cream all prepared and cooked by Guy - Elspeth you are a lucky lady.

The afternoon was spent doing lessons and concert prep where our new Dennis showed off his evasive skills. It was a great day fully enjoyed by all.



Days 11 & 12: Sat & Sun 24th & 25th Sept ~ Weekend Fun

Lots of fun for the children over a reasonably dry and warm weekend. Angelina Cotton, Vadim Pattison, Pasha Turnbull and Andrei Smith all met up on the Sunday at the first annual FOCC Duck Race.



Day 13: Mon 26th Sept ~ Beecraigs

The day started with lessons in the hall before setting off for Beecraigs Country Park which was a last minute replacement for the day in the forest.

On arrival at the park we were met by Gemma one of the park rangers who took us to see their herd of highland cattle. There was a lot of burgers on the hoof they were big for two year olds. Next we were taken to the deer enclosure where the children had great fun feeding them then on to meet Bertie the orphaned fawn and fun was had when we were all allowed to stroke him although he did take a shy to Vadzim and we were left wondering who adopted who. Next we set off to the B.B.Q. area and while we tried to get it going the children had great fun in the adjacent adventure park but while the B.B.Q. did light time was pressing on and it was felt that food was the priority and so we abandoned the idea and set off to the hall where Bob and Nat cooked the sausages which disappeared all too quickly all in all a great day despite the setback.

Fun Stuff: Meeting Bertie the orphaned fawn.

Stars of the day: Vadzim for adopting Bertie or was it the other way round, and of course our own **deer** Luda.



Day 14: Tue 27th Sept ~ Summerlee



Today started as usual with some school work in the hall before setting off for Summerlee museum where we were met by Billy who showed us where we could have our packed lunch. After lunch we had some time to view some of the exhibits in the main hall before again going outside to meet Donald the tram driver (something Edinburgh doesn't have yet).



A short journey later with full running commentary Donald

pulled to a stop outside the miners rows where the children saw what it was like here in the 1800's. Then it was off down the mine where we were shown the conditions that the miners worked in at those times, quite horrendous, with even children as young as 6 being employed to push bogeys of coal. On seeing a bottle with a candle stuck in Kerry our guide was asked if the miners had a drink at work not only did they have a beer the area was used for lunch & toilet by up to 30 men. This was an area about 15ftx15ft.



Fun Stuff: Down the mine sorry too dark for pictures and Kostya's expression when with a little guidance discovered he was the high scorer on an interactive display.

Stars of the day: Must be Donald for going that extra mile and letting us into the tram shed and on to the Auchenshuggle Tram.

Day 15: Wed 28th Sept ~ Coatbridge Fire Station



The day started with school lessons followed by snack. After snack it was time to head off to Coatbridge fire station to meet Kenny's good friend, Ross. After a quick safety briefing the children - and Luda(!) changed into their firefighter uniforms and the true fun began. Our mini firefighters rolled hoses, learnt about all the equipment on each engine and thoroughly enjoyed water jets from the hoses.

Each mini firefighter took time to sit in the cab of the engine before heading off to eat the lovely party lunch provided by our firefighting friends. Before leaving our friends at Coatbridge the children were all presented with a very generous goody bag and firefighter hats. A fabulous day for everyone involved and we are extremely grateful for the great memories made today.



Stars of the day: Star of the day had to be Nikita - brave enough to soak Luda with the hose.

Day 16: Thu 29th Sept ~ The Bubbles Factory (Carluke) & Motherwell College

Another fabulous day with the children started with school lessons before heading off to the Bubbles Factory soft play area in Carluke. The children loved it, and were very glad to have a cooling drink and snack which were kindly provided by the staff. A huge thank you to Martin Hannah for inviting us to his fantastic play area.



We then travelled on to Motherwell College where we were could not have been made more welcome. First up was a fantastic 3 course lunch in the restaurant where we were waited on by the students. Fruit cocktail, followed by breaded chicken and pasta, followed by Creme Brulee or Apple Crumble and custard. We were all absolutely stuffed when the extra pink cakes arrived as compliments of the chef!



Next up was cake decorating, and the children were taken step by step through the process and then allowed to finish off their own cakes with their own designs made with chocolate buttons and other sweets. The completion for the best decorated cake was a very close run thing, but eventually Graham, the head chef, chose Sasha Sterrick's cake. We do hope that all of the host families found the cakes to be as delicious as they looked.



As a further parting gift, the children were each given their own individual holdall stuffed full of jackets, clothes, items for school and sweets. An extraordinarily kind and thoughtful gift that I know has been greatly appreciated by the children and host families.



Our sincere thanks and admiration go out to Gordon, Graham, Maria, David, Jim, Tony, David and everyone else at Motherwell College for such a wonderful visit. Your outstanding kindness will undoubtedly be one of our fondest memories of this visit.

Stars of the day: Sasha Sterrick for having the best decorated cake. Vadzim for tidying away the school tables ... single handed!



Day 17: Fri 30th Sept ~ Swimming & Beecraigs

With two of the girls off to re-visit the dentist in the morning (Angelina Cotton and Krystina McKay), the rest of the children got down to lessons before heading off to the Broxburn Swimming pool. The staff were brilliant and roped off an area for us in the big pool and supplied arm bands, floats and lots of other toys, although the toughest game we played was keeping wee Dennis out of the Mothers and Babies pool!



Back at the Church Hall there was time for some more school work before Janice Smith brought in a lovely healthy McDonalds for lunch with Greggs cakes for pudding, which was greatly enjoyed by the children.

Time for some concert practice before a change of plan (you can't waste a good weather day in Scotland) and instead of indoor crafts we headed back to Beecraigs Country Park where the children had a ball playing on the swings, climbing ropes and flying foxes. After a picnic snack of milk and gorgeous rock cakes, it was time to head back to the Church Hall to tidy up and start the weekend.



Fun Stuff: Watching our fearless children (especially Dasha, Krystina & Olga) on the climbing ropes at Beecraigs.



Stars of the day: Angelina Cotton for being so brave at the dentist and not complaining about her swollen face. Olga and Dzianis for excellent swimming, and Masha Bishop for being so brave with what turned out to be an ear infection.

Day 18 & 19: Sat & Sun 1st & 2nd Oct ~ Weekend



Joe and Sharon Bishop (Masha's hosts) were persuaded to partake in their first workout for the year when they took Masha to East Links Fortress on Saturday. Little Miss Motivator I think!

The Stenhouses (Natasha's hosts) went

clothes and winter boot shopping. Never again with 3 girls! Lucy, Katie and Natasha emerged from the changing rooms an hour later with Natasha dressed head to toe in a new outfit declaring she was wearing it home and putting her old one in a bag! It took another 15 mins trying to explain to a determined 9 year old she had to take off the clothes to pay! All delighted with their purchases eventually though!



... and Vadzim decided to become a fairy doctor!

Day 20: Mon 3rd Oct ~ Kelvingrove & Transport Museum



The day started as usual with some school work before making an early start for Kelvingrove Museum where we were met by Lyn who took us to see some still life art before getting the children making their own still life. Next it was on to see some Scottish art where we were asked to pay attention to the detail of the kilts. Then came the test ... we were shown how to make a piece of tartan into a kilt by folding it properly such that you could not only have something to wear, but it could have a pockets and a hood (were our descendants the first hoodies). Next up was hands on /in painting which the children thoroughly enjoyed and all this before lunch.

Just a short drive to the new Museum of Transport to be met by Katriona and taken on a tour including trams and subway trains, where the children were even allowed to "drive" the subway train.

Next on to see the model ships and although these were large scale models used by the shipyards, Pasha thought it would be great in the bath! Must be a huge bath at Kenny's!



Fun Stuff: Hands on/in painting

Stars of the day: Has to be our highlanders.

Day 21: Tue 4th Oct ~ Photos, Concert Preparation & Swimming



Quieter day with lessons to be completed and plenty of concert preparation needing to be done, including the first rehearsals in the main Church.

In the morning Roddy dropped in to take the end of visit photos, and the children all enjoyed the little break from their work.

Lunch was soup (with the children choosing between Kenny's Mothers soup (chicken and rice) and Kenny's Mother-in-laws soup (potato)), then cheese and ham rolls, followed by cakes and tablet. Nobody went hungry!

In the afternoon we returned to Broxburn Swimming Pool where the children spread themselves across both

pools keeping Bob and Ian pretty busy!

Back to the church hall for final concert preparation and pick up.

Fun Stuff: Watching Nikita turning on the charm again, this time with the pool attendant, who played head the ball with him for over half an hour! Cunningly, Angelina Grant then managed to do the same with the male pool attendant.

Stars of the day: Kostya for helping to tidy up after lunch (and being a wonderful babooshka) and Masha for some excellent work at the concert preparations.

Day 22: Wed 5th Oct ~ Broxburn Primary Schools

Today we were visiting 3 of the Primary Schools in Broxburn.



It was an early start as we were to be at **Broxburn Primary School** at 9.15. We were made very welcome by Mrs Carder and were shown into two of the classes to see their classrooms and what projects/artwork they had on display. Amongst other things we learned how the lighthouse keepers got their food and kept the seagulls at bay. We were then taken to the gym hall where we were entertained by the Broxburn children singing Three Crows and The Welly Boot song which we had to translate into English for Katia. Our children sang two songs which were very well received. The question and answer session was quite enlightening with Olya telling the children she has to walk an hour each way to school on her own, beside the forest which has wolves. The visit was rounded off by us being presented with two large cards from the children and some gifts from the staff.

Next up was a visit to **St. Nicholas Primary School** where we were met by Mr Kelly who told us that he read in his newspaper about the children being at the fire station. Good news travels fast. We were taken to a classroom where two classes were waiting for us. It was the class of Lauren and Megan (Dashas sisters) and they were very happy to have Dasha sitting next to them in their school. The Broxburn children recited two very entertaining poems – one about an apple and another about socks and shoes. Sasha and Andrei also recited some poems in Russian before both the Broxburn and Belarus children sang songs. Again the question and answer session was very revealing with most of the Belarus children having pets such as 13 chickens, 5 pigs, 2 goats, 2 dogs, cats etc and the Broxburn children having snakes, turtles and Lizards. When asked about schools Andrei proudly announced that his school was very big and had 30 pupils. He was very surprised to hear that the school we were in had almost 500. We then had a packed lunch supplied by the host parents and some soup supplied by the lovely dinner ladies. This gave the children lots of energy for their play in the playground where they made lots of new friends. Sadly we had to say our goodbyes and we had a huge group of children waving to the minibus as we left.



Our final visit of the day was to **Kirkhill Primary School** where we were met by Mrs Moir. We were taken to the gym hall where we joined two classes for some nice action songs which all the children joined with – Head shoulders knees and toes and If your happy and you know it – which the children remembered well from last year. We were then split into two groups for a tour of the school and some colouring of Scottish Pictures. Again the question and answer session kept Katia occupied and was very popular with the children who were all desperate to give their answers. The

visit was finished off with an indoor play in the play area before the children were given a pen, gift and postcard of Broxburn.

Thank you to all three primary schools for a nice day out for the children.

Finally it was back to the church for a run through of the whole concert which is looking good.

Stars of the day: Masha for her enthusiastic answers to the childrens questions and Sasha Sterrick for her excellent dancing and acting skills.

Day 23: Thu 6th Oct ~ Glamour & Concert



Lessons and lots of final concert preparation throughout the day. We were joined by Olwyn Keogh MBE (the charity founder and Chief Exec), who had come up to meet us all and to see the concert. In the afternoon the girls got all glammed up having their nails done in beautiful reds, purples and pinks.



In the evening the children, all dressed up in their posh frocks and smart shirts, put on a fantastic concert to say thank you to everybody who had supported their visit. They all sang and danced their

hearts out and their smiles and enthusiasm were clear for all to see. Luda had created a wonderful concert which was enjoyed by all!



Fun Stuff: Seeing the children get so much joy from their concert.

Stars of the day: Luda for such a fantastic concert.

Day 24: Fri 7th Oct ~ Whitburn Community Centre



An early start at the Church Hall with a trip out to Whitburn Community Centre. Ian, Derek, Scott, Aimy & Darren gave us a wonderful welcome and a lovely day out. First up was fun in the gymnasium with hockey, hops, footballs and lots of other activities. Next was a crafts / jewellery making session with table tennis, pool, and Wii games for those who wanted to take a break. We were then joined by Magic Mac who delighted and thrilled the children (and adults) with his magic presentation . We were then presented



with a couple of very generous cheques to support our activities, the funds for which had been raised at the centre, and the children were each given their own personal gift bag with lots of treats and essentials to be taken back

to Belarus. Last up was lunch followed by a very fond farewell to all at the community centre. Many thanks to Jess and all at the community centre for what was a truly lovely visit.



On the way back to the Church Hall we stopped off at Polkemmet Country Park to let the children blow off a little more steam ahead of the weekend.

Fun Stuff: Dasha calling out to Magic Mac that she knew how he had done his magic tricks, and the delight on all of the children's faces as they saw magic happen before their very eyes.

Stars of the day: All at Whitburn Andrei for winning the Wii boxing

tournament. Gillian for stepping in and driving the minibus when the Daily Co-ordinator was delayed. Vadzim for his fearlessness while playing at Polkemmet.



Day 25 & 26: Sat & Sun 8th & 9th Oct ~ Final Weekend

Final shopping and farewells to family and friends ahead of Tuesday's departure. Sounds like the initial bag packing is proving challenging for many of us with lots of comments about very heavy bags!

Day 27: Mon 10th Oct ~ Butterfly & Insect World – Karma Restaurant



Lots of fun at Butterfly & Insect World today where the children enjoyed the tropical heat and meeting all sorts of creepy crawlies!

In the evening, most of the children met for dinner at the Karma Restaurant in Whitburn where last year's delicious food was surpassed, and the children all had a magnificent meal on their last full day in Scotland.

Fun Stuff: Watching the children dancing at the Karma Restaurant – something like Strip the Willow, but you got to select your own partner whenever it was your turn to lead.

Stars of the day: Vadzim for a very healthy appetite at the restaurant, and Olya for handling all of the creepy crawlies.



Day 28 & 29: Tue & Wed 11th & 12th Oct ~ Returning Home

Tuesday was a day off for many of the children who all gathered together at the Church Hall at 8.00pm ahead of their final trip back to their homes in Belarus. Lots of hugs kisses and tears as we headed off. The trip down to Gatwick airport by minibus went well with most sleeping for the majority of the journey, and plenty of time being left for a quick breakfast at Tesco ahead of checked in. There were lots of farewell hugs before the children, Katia and Luda headed off to security, and what turned out to be a safe and uneventful return home.