



Dear Friends of The Harbor:

Christmas, 2013

Christmas...the time of year we contemplate the miracle of God becoming man. He came to us in flesh and blood to show us who He is. Our LORD is a very experiential God. He does not expect us to simply understand Him cognitively, but wants us to know Him and His presence in our lives. He has and will go to great extremes to make this happen. Likewise, He has sent us into the world, to be His hands and feet. He doesn't want us only to tell people about Him, but to show them who He is, as well. One way we show them is by treating people the way Jesus would treat them, and seeing them as Jesus does. He expects us to be willing to go to equally great extremes to do this. Clearly, this is a daunting task.

As I was thinking about this, it dawned on me that this is exactly what our Harbor staff are doing. It is such an honor to serve and work with them. They are the hands and feet of Jesus to all these young teenage orphans. Whether it is Tatiana, our first graduate to receive her Master's Degree; Christina, getting ready to graduate from one of the most prestigious universities in Russia and go to Italy to utilize her degree; Nadia, studying in South Africa for a year with YWAM (Youth With A Mission) and working towards becoming a missionary; or Loshia and Alexi, who attended a Bible course to pursue an understanding of their new found interest in the Bible and Jesus; their successes can be traced back to the loving and professional staff at The Harbor. They go way beyond working a job. They nurture the participants with hugs and kind words. They answer questions, teach, help with homework, discipline, encourage, cry, laugh, work, celebrate, and dream together...this is why The Harbor is more successful than any other program we know of.

I want to highlight a few here to give you an idea of what I mean.

Luba is our National Director and has been with us from the very first day. In her pursuit to be the best mentor to the kids that she can be, she has earned three bachelor degrees. She has sacrificed endlessly for the participants of The Harbor, doing whatever is necessary. When three girls were ready to graduate from our program, but did not have any place to move into, Luba naturally invited them to live with her. She moved out of her tiny bedroom and gave it to them, while she went on the couch in the office. This arrangement lasted for two years and ended up being life-changing for all the girls.

Recently, Luba's heart has been breaking for the orphans who become young single mothers. In The Harbor's attempt to stop the cycle of orphans giving birth to more orphans, we were not touching this population at all. Luba changed that by starting the Young Mother's Program as a new outreach of The Harbor. Additionally, the city asked her if we would help them run a Cultural Center for at-risk-kids. Seeing this as an opportunity to help more kids, as well as develop a trusting relationship with the government, she said, "Yes." However, we could not afford to hire anyone else to run it, so Luba just added this to her plate. Last year Luba received an award from the city government as one of the most active charity workers in the city.

Natasha is our psychologist and is quite a pioneer. There is no official degree as a Christian Psychologist in Russia, and there are only a few of them in the city attempting to integrate their faith with their practice. She is constantly learning and is earning certificates in quite a few fields, such as, attachment disorders, art therapy, play therapy, and post traumatic stress disorders, just to name a few. I am encouraging her to begin writing, as she is on the cutting edge of applying these therapies where no one else is. Natasha has her work cut out for her. Counseling is mandatory at The Harbor, yet, of all the people our participants distrust and fear, a psychologist is at the top of the list. It is fair to say that none of them have had previously positive experiences with any psychologist. Nevertheless,

she is winning them over. With each new year, Natasha's reputation is going before her. The older participants report to the newer ones that Natasha is great. Because of this, she is able to achieve more and go deeper with them every year. Natasha is always looking for ways to do "therapy" with them in more relational and informal ways. She has developed a sewing class that even the boys love. They create patterns for little stuffed animals, make them, and sell them all over the city. With the money they earn they buy extra things for the apartments, and also plan a yearly excursion. Natasha is taking them to historical sites around Western Russia. They are learning their country's history, as well as the many things travel teaches.

Oleg has his law degree, is a youth pastor and a worship leader for a local church, a husband and father of two young sons. At the same time, he is the director of our boys' program. His three passions are music, orphans, and the church. He is a great role model for our young men, and they readily connect with him. Oleg is a visionary and is constantly thinking of how to better do what we do, and how to do more. On my recent trip, he was unpacking for me his desire to start a new center for all the orphans of the city that would serve as a "resource center." Anything and everything they need would be there; legal advice, tutors, resume writing, counseling, etc. I told him, let's do it! Oleg is working on finishing his bachelor's degree in psychology, first, which he will complete this year.

Vadim lives in one of our Next Step apartments. This is for graduates of The Harbor who just need a little more time and experience before they feel confident to go out on their own. Vadim, his wife, and three children live with four young men. Vadim and his family love this work! Leadership in Russia is typically very authoritarian and powering over people. Vadim is a huge man whose physical presence could be very intimidating. Yet, he has one of the gentlest spirits of any person I know. He is a radical example in this culture of servant leadership. He is amazing with the young men, and they love him and his family. Vadim, also, wants to be a better mentor, so he is finishing his degree in psychology, as well.

Information without heart connection doesn't accomplish much. That is why the Father sent the Son. As you give thanks this Christmas season for the Son, please, also, give thanks for these wonderful men and women who serve as His hands and feet to the participants at The Harbor. Your financial investment of The Harbor makes their ministries possible.



(Luba in middle with girls)



(Natasha)



(Oleg with cap on, Vadim top left)

Joy to the world! May earth receive her King! Merry Christmas from all at The Harbor!

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