

Ukraine: Inna's Story



“I do not want Dasha to be ashamed of her mother. I want her to hold tight to my hand and feel proud that she has a mother who loves and protects her little girl.” Inna.

Life had been very difficult for Inna, her father had left when she was a baby and her mother had found it difficult to cope. Their living conditions were extremely poor and when Inna discovered she was pregnant, it put intolerable pressure on her relationship with her mother. At 17, Inna found herself alone, unable to care for her newborn daughter, and was referred to our Mother and Baby Unit in Kherson.

At the Unit it was clear that Inna was a wonderful mother to Dasha, but she was lonely and depressed. She continually wrote to her mother, but received no reply. We helped Inna to accept that their relationship could not be reconciled, and we worked with the local authority to find her a house in a nearby village. Additionally, we found her a job and a place for Dasha at Kindergarten.

As Inna was concerned for her younger brother, whom she had had to leave at home, we arranged for him to live with her in their new home, where we can support the whole family.

Mother and Baby Units

Mother and Baby Units are just one of the range of services we set up to help prevent child abandonment and keep these vulnerable families together. The Unit provides mothers with short-term residential care, giving them time to bond with their babies, and the opportunity to learn parenting skills, finish their education or gain employment so they can lead an independent life. Additionally, we work with the mothers to help them repair damaged relationships so they can return to their families.

For mothers in crisis situations - at risk of having to place their children in care - our Mother and Baby Units ensure that children are not growing up in institutions, but where they belong - with their mothers who love them.

Tetiana Bondarenko one of Hope and Homes for Children's Project Managers in Ukraine said, “I am proud, in 2007, that 96% of the young women we supported in our Mother and Baby Units were able to go on to live independently with their babies. I consider this the biggest achievement of my work.”



Above: Facilities at a Mother and Baby Unit

Bosnia and Herzegovina: Oggi's Story



“The lives of these children will be transformed, as they will now know what it is like to feel loved.” Oggi.



Far Left:
Oggi learning photography as a young boy

Left:
Founder Presidents Mark and Caroline Cook survey the damage at the Bjelave institution in 1994

Below:
Oggi today, with a child from his documentary

Oggi first came into contact with us when he was living in the Bjelave institution in Sarajevo. He participated in our Young Adult Support Scheme, which prepared him for leaving the institution and living independently. Here, he tells us what it will mean to revolutionise the childcare system:

“The lives of these children will be transformed, as they will now know what it is like to feel loved. In an institution there’s no such thing as a family, and with so few staff you are treated as a big group of children, not even as an individual.

Before, these children would have been forced to leave the institution when they turned 18. With no one to care about them, nowhere to stay and no money, their future would have been very poor. But now they will have a family for the rest of their lives

and the chance of a normal life - something that was taken from us all when we were put in an institution.

There’s not a beautiful institution in the world. However nice they may look or however many toys they have, the best place for a child to be is in a family.” Institutional care denies children the opportunity to fulfil their potential. There is no better environment for a child to grow up in than that of a loving family; a value that underpins all that we do.”

The story continues...

Oggi is studying for a degree in Documentary Film and Television Making. He is currently working with us to create a film to help prepare children for life in family-based care. Children leaving institutions have lots to learn about their new lives and the world can seem like a scary place.

In the film, children and young adults from our projects in Central and Eastern Europe talk about how they felt about leaving the institutions they lived in and what their lives are like now. This will help allay any fears that children still living in institutions may have as they will be able to hear for themselves what to expect from their life-changing move.



South Africa: Thembasila & Raul's Story



As part of the family's individually tailored support package, we arranged for Thembasila and Raul to be enrolled in one of our Community Hubs.

Thembasila, aged four, and her five year old brother, Raul, attend a Community Hub close to their home in Moretele. Together with six other brothers and sisters, they were cared for by their grandmother, Elizabeth.

When Elizabeth died in June 2007, their eldest sister, Ibi, who is just 16 years old, became the head of the household. Community members alerted us to the family's situation and we immediately gave them food parcels, and assessed their long term needs.

Previously, Thembasila and Raul had stayed at home with their grandmother while their brothers and sisters went to school, but, with no one to care for them after she died, they would either have had to be left at home alone or Ibi would have had to give up school to care for them.

As part of the family's individually tailored support package, we arranged for Thembasila and Raul to be enrolled in one of our Community Hubs. With the two youngest children cared for during the day, the rest of the family are now able to continue with their education.

One of our specially trained community volunteers also visits the family regularly. She helps with practical things like cooking and homework, while providing emotional support at this difficult time.



Left: Community Hubs are particularly important in rural areas



Spotlight on: Community Hubs

In South Africa, many of the families we support live in rural areas. The infrastructure is often poor and travel can be difficult so it is important that our assistance is accessible to those who need it the most. With this in mind, we developed our Community Hubs, to empower entire communities and help them care for their vulnerable children.

At the Hubs, pre-school children enjoy activities that help develop their social and co-ordination skills. They also have a cooked meal, which for some is their only food for the day. The Hubs are regularly visited by a nurse who monitors the children's health, giving them basic medication and referring them to a local hospital if required. Older children, most of whom are heads of their household, visit the Hubs after school. Here they are also fed and there are always volunteers and social workers on hand to help with homework, give life skills training and to provide emotional support. For many, this assistance and guidance is the only adult help they get.