

## **Russia Field Report**

### **August 1, 2011**

The past six months, if anything, have seen a greater sense of focus, stability and unity of vision come to our field. While small in number and spread out over great distances, we feel very close to one another and are unified in regards to vision, strategy and how to proceed forward with the work. We feel momentum now even more than ever.

### **Review of Strategy**

The Russia field has adopted the strategy of "Transformational Development" in a broad understanding. This was presented in my report at the last board meeting. The strategy is summarized as follows:

- The main goal is the spread of the gospel and to plant churches.
- With churches already in existence in Russia, we see ourselves in a more facilitating role, working with indigenous churches to meet this goal.
- Transformational Development addresses four main areas of ministry in order to help strengthen the church and help it grow. Working in these four areas can be referred to as "poverty alleviation." These areas are:
  - Spiritual Poverty - Need of reconciliation to God
  - Poverty of Community - Need for reconciliation to others
  - Poverty of Being - Need to understand oneself and one's own calling
  - Poverty of Stewardship - Biblical management of resources

Examining each worker's individual gifts and callings and working alongside our indigenous partners, we hope to see all four areas being addressed in the various geographical regions of Russia in which we work, and potentially where we hope to work.

### **Recruitment**

Adopting this strategy, and taking the role of facilitators affects greatly how we recruit. There are essentially two basic positions we could take.

Be very "organizational" in Russia - This would involve registering an organization in the Russian Federation that, for all intents and purposes, would be under the control of InterAct, Inc., would invite foreigners to work, and would be the base of all operations for our work.

Be facilitators - In this approach, our recruitment is largely based on the desires of indigenous partners to develop assets tangible and intangible. Thus, in this approach, we focus on recruitment of qualified specialists to fulfill a specific role.

It is the consensus of our team that we function along the lines of the second approach. This can help avoid paternalism as well as help us keep in mind the strategic goal of seeing indigenous leaders directing the work. The only disadvantage to this is the lack of a very stable visa option for potential recruits. However, we feel that there are enough good options available that this will ultimately not be a problem.

### **Fields**

## Tuva

The majority of our work in Tuva is still focused on the area of small business development among believers with the goal of enabling the church to have resources and enable people to have jobs, thus fulfilling the cultural mandate in part. InterAct continues to partner with the organization *Vzaimodestvie* (vzai-ee-mo-DYEST-vee-yeh) in a number of areas.

Micro-Business - At the writing of this report, a total of 6,012,000 rubles have been invested through *Vzaimodestvie* into the local economy in Tuva since the work began in 2009. Of this total 4.19% (252,000 rubles) has been from local sources in Tuva and the remainder from the West. This is a significant step in the right direction since in 2010, 100% of funding came from the West. There are currently 9 small businesses up and running that have been funded through *Vzaimodestvie*, and there is about 50,000 rubles coming back into the cyclical fund on a monthly basis from repayment of these loans.

By the end of 2011 it is projected that the total overall investment from the local cyclical fund will be between 600,000 - 750,000 rubles, 9%-12% of total investments into the local economy. At the present time there are no definite plans to appeal to the West this year for projects specifically in Tuva. *Vzaimodestvie* would like to see two more businesses started this year with funds from local sources. If things continue according to plan, that would mean that 2 out of 3 small business projects started this year would have been funded from local sources.

Aside from the small business projects, InterAct does continue to help provide financial support to *Vzaimodestvie* to help keep the organization running. This includes helping to provide salary support for the new director of the organization, Vitaly Oondar and operational support. But these are also looked upon as temporary measures. By current projections, *Vzaimodestvie* could be completely independent from Western funding in 7-9 years. This goal is contingent upon *Vzaimodestvie* beginning work in the Republic of Yakutia also (see below).

Tuvan Bibles - As a non-for-profit in the Russian Federation *Vzaimodestvie* is able to engage in a number of activities that have cultural significance. The translation of the Bible into Tuvan falls under this category. Through fundraising efforts InterAct partnered with *Vzaimodestvie* and worked with the Institute for Bible Translation in Moscow to help print 7,000 copies of the Bible. At the writing of this report, the Bibles have been printed and are en route to Kyzyl, Tuva. The official presentation of the Bible will be done at a public ceremony in August by the head of the translation project Vitaly Voinov. InterAct missionary Lucas Orner will be making a few brief comments on behalf of InterAct during the ceremony.

A portion of the Bibles have been reserved for believers in Tuva. The remainder will be under the care of *Vzaimodestvie* who will coordinate efforts among local evangelical churches to distribute the Bibles in the regions.

Rehabilitation Center - Originally intended to be the "Yurt Church," this plan had to be altered because of Jim Capaldo's departure in 2009 and the lack of a church planter. The facilities were completed, however, and a suitable alternative has been found that is still consistent with the goals and vision of InterAct. *Vzaimodestvie*, who owns the facilities, has partnered with an experienced Christian drug and alcohol rehabilitation ministry to use the facilities. While initially the facilities will not be a "church" in the ecclesiastical/legal sense of the word, it will be a place where, while during the rehab process, the Word will be preached and Bible studies will be held. It is hoped that through this

ministry people will come to Christ and, indeed, a “church” in the formal sense can be organized at the location in the future.

Other Projects - It is important to note that through InterAct’s partnership with *Vzaimodestvie* other projects have begun locally from the cyclical fund, thus independent of direct Western funding and supportive of local initiative. These projects include:

- Kids games in school that communicate biblical principles
- Inductive Bible study method courses
- Plans to purchase land as a campsite that can be used by churches

Future Work - At the current time, InterAct missionaries Vanessa Greer and Lucas and Jamie Orner have plans to move into the Republic within the next year and work in other areas of Transformational Development work, consistent with the vision and strategy of the team. Their plans are given in further detail below under “Personnel Reports.”

### *Yakutia*

We currently have no personnel on the field in Yakutia, but we are continuing to explore partnerships and work in the Republic. In January, Scott Gilbert traveled to Yakutsk to meet with national leaders who are interested in the small business work going on in Tuva. Scott was able to meet with believers regarding four projects. At present, *Vzaimodestvie* is planning to change their bylaws to state that the organization not only works in the “Republic of Tuva” but “The Russian Federation” as a whole. This would allow the organization to begin working with believers in Yakutia also. It is hoped that this amendment to the bylaws can be made within the next year and that 3-4 projects can begin in Yakutia by 2013.

It is hoped that funding for initial projects started in Yakutia will not have to be completely from Western sources. The financial situation in the Republic, while difficult, is a little better than in Tuva. It has therefore been proposed that startup capital for businesses could potentially be done as matching funds, and perhaps even local donors could be found. Much is uncertain at this time.

### *St. Petersburg*

The Russia field is currently exploring the possibility of working among Central-Asian Muslims in the St. Petersburg area. This idea is supported by the team for the following reasons.

- Recognition of Central-Asian immigrants as an “overlooked” and virtually “unreached” community living in Russia. It is estimated that between 1.5 - 2 million Central-Asian Muslim immigrants are living in the St. Petersburg area, with the majority coming from Uzbekistan, one of the most restrictive and closed countries in Central Asia.
- Need to strengthen and expand the base ministries of the Russia field and have more personnel on the field. This will strengthen the team as a whole.
- Need to have an established ongoing ministry in the European part of the country. The team agrees that having a base of ministry here is critical to current, and especially future work in the country for a variety of reasons.
- Strong connection between Central-Asian immigrants to the Native peoples of Siberia, linguistically, ethnically and culturally.
- Already established contact with a local Central-Asian pastor working among immigrants in St. Petersburg who is looking for partnerships to help carry out the work.

- Basis for working among Muslims already exists in Canada.
- Desire among the leadership of *Vzaimodestvie* work among Central-Asian immigrants.

This work is still in the exploratory stages and will be brought before the ELT later this year. No definitive plans or steps have thus far been taken, but there is significant encouragement to continue exploring this possible ministry.

## **Personnel Reports**

### *Vanessa Greer*

Vanessa returned to Russia this past Spring after a brief time in the States. While there she finished up her college education. Upon returning to Russia she continued her Russian studies at the State University in Krasnoyarsk. This location put her strategically closer to Tuva (only a 12 hour drive). She is currently in the process of getting a work visa to teach at an English school in Kyzyl. If all goes well, she should be able to start work in Kyzyl around January of 2012. Hopefully around Christmas she will have the invitation in hand and can return to the States to process the visa and then return to Tuva after the New Year. Until that time she has begun seeking out ministry opportunities among Tuvan women studying in Krasnoyarsk. Once in Tuva she'll be obligated to teach at the school an estimated 15 hours per week. She has been encouraged by church leaders to help head up a "sisters fellowship" in Tuva.

### *Lucas and Jamie Orner*

The Orners still plan to move to Ak-Dovurak and help in the church while teaching English at a school there. They are currently also living in Krasnoyarsk on student visas. They've been working on getting documents together and have been communicating closely with the director of the school. The hope is to move to Ak-Dovurak this fall once the invitations are ready and to work and encourage the local believers and be ministry facilitators. While in Krasnoyarsk though, they have had some very unique opportunities to minister to Chinese students.

### *Scott Gilbert*

Scott continues his studies at the Tuvan State University and works with *Vzaimodestvie*. His plans are to continue in this capacity for the near future. Most of Scott's work has been covered in the section above detailing the work of *Vzaimodestvie* in Tuva.

### *Ted and Kate Mole*

The Moles continue to live and work in Alaska, where Ted teaches at Alaskan Bible College. He is currently working towards his certification which will be recognized by the local government in Yakutia. Their future plans entail them returning to Yakutia, most likely in the form of an itinerant ministry, to setup an alcohol counseling facility in the village of Namtsy. It is hoped that by the time this takes place this could possibly be done in partnership with *Vzaimodestvie*.

### *Thomas and Cristy Slawson*

Our family is finishing off the summer in St. Petersburg. My primary work has been overseeing the ministries of the Russia field, planning the Summer Impact trip and field conference and researching

the possibility for Muslim ministries in St. Petersburg. We plan to return to the States August 10th where I will continue in the capacity of field director administratively and perform other duties for the mission. Further information about these duties will be given by Dale.

## **Other Activities**

### *Russia Field Conference*

Our team met July 1-5 in Krasnoyarsk, Russia for our annual conference. During this time team members presented their reports and we also took the time as a team to discuss relevant field issues.

### *Summer Impact*

We were joined this summer by sisters Anna and Alina Mileyev, our two interns for our “Face of Russia” Summer Impact program. Anna and Alina have provided a very unique and refreshing perspective for our team. Born in Ukraine, they immigrated to the United States with their families when they were 5 and 3 respectively. They currently live in Minneapolis and have grown up in a bi-cultural environment. Both are fluent in English and Russian, and both have a strong desire to return to Russia and minister. At the writing of this report, they are currently in Tuva with Vanessa Greer and Scott Gilbert, and will be returning to the States on July 28th. Their participation during the Russia field conference was greatly appreciated. Their coming to Russia this summer has also opened up the possibility of partnering with other Evangelical Russian-speaking congregations in the U.S. who are desirous to send missionaries back to Russia.

## **Conclusion**

Our team is small, but we believe we have well-defined goals, vision and strategy from which we can move forward. Our hope is to see the team have reasonable growth in the next 3-5 years and focus primarily on partnerships with indigenous ministries to facilitate the growth of the church in Russia.

Pressing on in Christ,  
Thomas Slawson