



# Russia Field Report

August 2013 – Portland, Oregon

## Overview

It is with bitter sweetness that I write this final report to the Board in my position as Russia Field Director. Since joining InterAct in 2005 our lives have centered around Russian ministry, and much has changed. We are thankful that the Lord has allowed us to serve, and we look forward to our continued relationship to the Russia field and the ministry there.

The Russia field is strong and continues to get stronger. We are small but well established. This year we have seen a new full-time member, Shawna Hess, join our ranks in the Buryat Republic. A Sakha man and his Russian wife, Vladimir and Tatinana Burnashev, who serve with Wycliffe in Yakutia, have recently been seconded part-time to InterAct to work towards transformational ministry there. And most recently we received an application from Frankie Emrick for full-time service on our Russia field. Since 2009 we've seen steady progress.

| 2009   | 2013  |
|--|---|
| Eight missionaries (5 units)                                   | Eleven missionaries including seconded (6 units)  |
| Three Russian speakers on our field                            | Eleven Russian speakers on our field  |
| Two defined areas of long-term ministry (Tuva, St. Petersburg) | Four defined areas of long-term ministry (Tuva, Krasnoyarsk, Buryatia, Yakutia) plus continued contacts in St. Petersburg with the central Asian, Muslim ministry |
| No missionaries in the pipeline for full-time service.         | One missionary in the pipeline for full-time service.   |

In addition to our own numbers growing, we have begun to work in partnership more closely with other missionaries and indigenous ministries. This has proved to be a very effective strategy.

Despite the distances, our field has grown very close. The challenges of missionary life in Russia tend to be the uniting factor in our relationships rather than geographical location. It is exciting to see what the Lord has done, how He has established us and begun to grow our ministries.

## **Personnel and Ministries**

### **Shawna Hess**

Shawna is a great addition to the Russian team, her preexisting ministry fitting right into the team's vision and work. Her passion is studying the culture of the Buryat people and their Buddhist background and how it affects the local church and believers. Her desire is to disciple believers, teaching them culturally effective ways to reach their families and friends in the villages. She shares an apartment with two believing Buryat ladies in the city of Ulan-Ude.

### **Scott and Vanessa Gilbert**

Summer 2013 marks the end of an extremely full and difficult year for the Gilberts in Kyzyl. For visa purposes, Vanessa was working a very demanding job at the university while Scott wrapped up his studies there. Both have been freed of those obligations and are feeling a weight lifted off their shoulders. Scott continues to teach entrepreneurial courses throughout the year as well as teaching in the church occasionally. He and Vanessa are excited by steps taken in the local church to more actively reach the Tuvan people (the majority of church leadership is Russian). Vanessa is praying for wisdom regarding which discipleship ministries to put her energies into in the coming year. Scott is also starting a pine nut processing business, which will be starting up in the upcoming year and will fund opportunities for ministry. He also has plans to take a more active role in a rehabilitation ministry in Tuva.

### **Ted and Kate Mole**

While living and working in Alaska, the Moles' passion for the Yakut people remains strong. They desire to support local believers in the founding and running of a counseling/rehab center in the town of Namtsy. They do not foresee living in Russia full-time in the next couple years, but have left it open as a possibility for the future along with the option of an itinerant type ministry.

### **Vladimir (Vova) and Tatiana (Tanya) Burnashev**

The Burnashev's have a passion to see growth among the Yakut church, specifically seeing more services and ministries done in the Yakut language. Tanya (who is Russian) is diving in and studying the language and adapting to life in Yakutia. She is expecting a baby this Fall. Vova is also working toward getting local businessmen to start an organization similar to *Vzaimodestvie* in Tuva that would support local believers in starting small businesses.

### **Lucas and Jamie Orner**

The Orners continue to serve in Krasnoyarsk, where they participate in English clubs and various outreach events. The bulk of their ministry is relationship/discipleship based. In June 2013 they served at a camp for children with spinal disabilities. While not their ministry focus, it strengthened relationships with local workers and opened doors for future partnerships with *The Elisha Foundation* and Krasnoyarsk churches.

### **Thomas and Cristy Slawson**

Our family is well established now in the Portland area. Over the last six months I have transitioned more and more out of my role as field director and more into the public ministries ministry. We look forward to continuing our relationship over the years, and I hope to continue to serve the Russia field as a home office liaison. I also still have hopes of visiting Russia annually and perhaps leading small church teams over. We still hold out hope that our family will at some point in the future be able to travel together and spend 2-3 months in Russia.

### **Russian Field Conference**

The conference was held June 29-July 2 in the Sayan Mountains, just north of Tuva. The conference naturally took the focus of maintaining team unity despite the geographical distances that separate each of our ministry locations. (With Krasnoyarsk as a central hub, the Gilberts are 300 miles to the south; Shawna, 670 miles to the east; Burnashevs, 1,350 miles to NE.) Shawna fit easily into the team dynamic and gelled well with both the team's vision and personalities. Much time was spent in prayer for one another and strengthening relationships within the team.

### **Prayer**

- As the team met for conference, we came to realize that many of us had just wrapped up an extremely difficult year. Praise God for the endurance during struggles, for hope and joy despite difficult circumstances, and for the passion to continue and drive to continue serving our Creator.
- Pray for the team leadership transition.
- Continue to pray for more workers in Siberia and for wisdom for missionaries on the field that they would have wisdom in which ministries to commit to.

We give God all of the praise for what He has done. Over the last four years there has been many discouragements but many encouragements as we've seen the Lord work. There were times of doubt as to whether we could "turn the corner" with such a small team. I cannot help but think of how God used Gideon with his small band of 300 men to defeat a mighty army. We are blessed beyond measure.

Thomas Slawson  
Lucas Orner