

## Russia Field Board Report February, 2011

After a somewhat turbulent and sometimes frustrating year-and-a-half of transitioning, learning, making mistakes, and at times being utterly frustrated and confused, the Russia field is finally coming to a point of stability and focus from which we can begin to move forward. Since the departure of Jim Capaldo and my taking on the role of leadership of the Russia team, we have had to do a number of things.

### ***Changes***

#### *Unlearning What We Have Learned*

The vision and plans of Jim Capaldo in Tuva, and Russia at large were excellent. Unfortunately we came to the realization early on that because of many factors, it was a vision and plan that our team could not carry out. Much of what had been envisioned was based heavily on Jim being personally present in Tuva. It took us several months to figure this out. During this time, work went on and ministry was accomplished but there was a lot of confusion and a number of misunderstandings that has thankfully been resolved.

#### *Working Out Kinks*

During the time in which we were "unlearning" things, the work of helping to fund and develop small business ventures in Tuva continued. This process of transferring sometimes relatively large sums of money to a bank in a remote corner of Siberia did not come without headaches. Since funding small business ventures is something essentially completely new to InterAct it required a very large learning curve on my part and Scott Gilbert's. I'm happy to say that, while there are still some kinks in the system and we are continuing to learn, there are much fewer kinks than before, and the process is beginning to flow relatively smoothly. Many thanks goes to Roy for his ministry to us, patiently explaining how things work, re-explaining them, and explaining them again.

#### *Find a New Vision and Set a New Strategy*

Upon coming to the hard reality that the way we had hoped to do ministry in Tuva just wasn't going to work for us, we were faced with the challenge of finding a new vision and finding a new way of serving. I spent a considerable amount of time communicating with the Russia team, asking a lot of questions about giftedness and personal vision and for input from everyone. I also was able to make three trips out to Siberia this year, once to Yakutia, and twice to Tuva, to touch base with our indigenous ministry partners there. This also helped in the process of formulating our new vision and strategy.

After much prayer, thought and study, we as a team have settled on transformational development ministry strategy in Russia (**Note presentation entitled *Russia Vision and Strategy on disk provided***). This model will help us to maintain our focus as a team, keep a holistic view of the gospel in mind, and be able to see where each person fits into the "big picture" of the work of ministry. This model is drawn primarily from

Bryant Meyer's *Walking with the Poor* and Steven Corbett's and Brian Fikkert's book *When Helping Hurts*. The team is either currently reading these books or has already read them.

### ***Moving Forward***

By God's good providence, the majority of our team, as well as Dale and Carol, were in the Chicago area around the same time during the month of October. This allowed us to have our first field conference in over a year and a half. This was our first conference with me as director and with Dale as executive director. The only teammates not present were Kate Mole, Cristy Slawson and Scott Gilbert, all of whom we were able to Skype in for an update.

The conference was a tremendous blessing in so many ways. It allowed all of us to spend some much needed fellowship time together. We were also able as a team to discuss the above transformational development strategy and get on the same page. If all goes well we hope to meet again in the summer of 2011.

### ***Building Up a New Team***

Now that we have something to recruit to, I am very much desiring to focus a large portion of my energies to seeing a new, well-trained, and passionate team raised up for a new era of missions in Russia. We already have a tremendous and talented "core" to start with. As I look at the giftedness and talent of our current team, Vanessa, the Orners, Scott and the Moles, I'm reminded of the words of Klinger on M\*A\*S\*H when we stated "Those who can't, manage those who can." I very much feel this sometimes.

### ***What's Happening Now***

Exciting things are happening with the small business projects in Tuva. Not only are we beginning to see some real tangible results, but we are also seeing some wonderful things happening relationally. But at the same time, there are still real struggles and many hurt feelings and wounded relationships that need healing. We are trying to keep in mind that, in the work of transformational development in every sphere (not just business), our focus should be on **people and processes** not **projects and products**.

### ***Personnel Updates***

**Lucas and Jamie Orner** have moved to the Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk, located about 14 hours by car north of Tuva, which for Siberia is considered a stone's throw. In order to secure a visa, they will be continuing to study the Russian language while making more regular trips down to Tuva. They hope that during the next year, by being closer to Tuva, they can secure more permanent visas to live and work there.

**Vanessa Greer** will be joining the Orners in Krasnoyarsk shortly. Her plan is to also study the Russian language further in order to obtain a stable visa. He also will make

short trips down to Tuva during this time and seek to obtain a more permanent solution for living there. During her time in the States she completed her Bachelor's degree, obtained TESOL certification and spent a considerable amount of time recruiting and representing for the mission.

**The Moles** hope to return to Yakutia within the next two years and work to see a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center built in their old village of Namtsy.

**Scott Gilbert** continues to focus on micro-business development in the Tuvan Republic. There have been many successes in this area over the last two years, and some major developments have been achieved.

**Our Family** is going to be mostly stateside for this year. It is my hope to focus heavily on mobilization. We plan to return to Russia for the summer to lead the summer program. Also during this time, I hope to finally settle a more permanent visa option whether it be teaching or getting things in order to secure a living permit. Our hope is to return more permanently to Russia sometime in December 2011/January 2012.

*Micro-business Development in Tuva (Note the presentation **Micro-finance in Russia on the disk provided**)*

One of the key functions of *Vzaimodeistvie* is the development of small to medium-sized businesses with the intent of reducing poverty and increasing the revenue for the ministry of the local church. This policy has seven stages.

**Stage 1: Idea stage** - The project is the dream or aspiration of the potential entrepreneur. If funding is available, the entrepreneur fulfills all of the requirements of the organization, and the members vote in favor of allocating funds.

*Current Projects:* Multiple

**Stage 2: Planning** - A business plan is written based on the writing guide that *Vzaimodeistvie* puts out. This plan includes not only analyzing the economic and financial aspects of business, but also what it means to be a Christian-entrepreneur.

*Current Projects:* cafe/bakery in the village of Toora-Khem (See map, ref. 1.1)

**Stage 3: Approval** - The plan has been written and is presented to *Vzaimodeistvie* members for approval. A vote is taken whether or not to support the project and allocate funds.

*Current Projects:* none

**Stage 4: Funding** - A project has received its necessary capital, and those funds are being utilized to equip the businesses with the necessary equipment.

*Current Projects:* 1) Cafe in Ak-Dovurak (map ref. 4.1), and 2) Soft-serve Ice-cream stand in Kyzyl (map ref. 4.2)

**Stage 5: *Development***- In this stage the business has begun to work. It may require further equipping as well as financing.

*Current Projects:* "Auto World" in Kyzyl (Oil change and auto repair in Kyzyl (map, ref 5.1), currently an average of 10 cars are being serviced per day. The response has been so good that there is a desire to see a subsidiary shop opened in Ak-Dovurak.

**Stage 6: *Partnership*** - In this stage the business is working and has started paying back its loan to the cyclical fund so others can have access to the capital.

*Current Projects:* 1) Block-making business in Ak-Dovurak (map ref. 6.1), 2) Potato/Oat farm in Aryg-Uzuiu (map ref. 6.2), 3) Construction Business in Kyzyl (map ref. 6.3), 3) Mazhalik Cafe in Kyzyl (map ref. 6.4)

**Stage 7: *Completed*** - At this stage the entrepreneur has returned all of his or her start-up capital and possibly additional funding to Vzaimodeistvie and is functioning at the independent partnership level.

*Completed Projects:* - Art Studio in Kyzyl (map ref. 7.1)

### *Encouraging Example*

Keep in mind that the goal of all of these business is to ultimately support the work of gospel ministry. With profits from the block-making business in Ak-Dovurak, the owner, Ayas Oorjak, along with brothers from the church was able to replace all of the old double-pane wooden windows in the church with new plastic ones. This was done without foreign funding. In addition, he was able to earn enough money to do remodeling on his own house. The Ak-Dovurak church was also able to purchase their own coal for this winter without having to request aid. Finally, Ayas is currently laying out a plan to purchase the new Tuvan Bible, which will be coming out this year, and distribute it. The plan is to do this all with funds from the block-making business.



### *Into 2011...*

The goal for the upcoming year is to significantly minimize requests for Western funding for startup capital. A significant amount of money has already been invested into the Tuvan economy and Vzaimodeistvie is beginning to see that money returned to the

cyclical fund. The plan is to use this money to make further loans to Christian entrepreneurs in 2011. At this point the hope is to start at least two new businesses.

From this point, our hope is to see more churches planted by doing transformational ministry with indigenous ministry partners. Our main focus will continue to be on Tuva and Yakutia with eventual hopes to expand to other areas where a team can be built.

### ***Make Plans and Plan to Change***

By far the wisest words of all I could quote in this report come from Solomon when he said "The mind of a man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps." We as a team have come to grips with the fact that it is very likely we will never see a day in Russia where we simply go over and live for 2-3 years at a time unhindered. There is no end to the visa problems and hassles in sight. But we are okay with this. We are reminded that what is most importance is obedience to God's calling. He has laid upon each team member's heart the deep desire to serve in Russia, and we are all striving to be obedient to that call. If obedience means having to spend half our time just trying to stay in the country, then we are ready. We get frustrated, but God does not. The hearts' of Russia's leaders are in his hand, and visa and political hassles can do nothing to thwart HIS plans. So we pursue this calling knowing that no matter what happens, the gates of hell shall not prevail.

-Thomas Slawson

# Current Micro-Business Projects in Tuva

