

# Russia Field Report

## February 2015

### Personnel Updates

Shawna Hess – Shawna continues to be a light in the local community through her interest and experience as a midwife. She is also involved in discipling and equipping Buriat people living in the city to return to the villages to share the gospel.

Scott and Vanessa Gilbert – In October, the Gilberts left Russia without plans to return. Cultural stress, bureaucracy, frustration with the business partners, corruption and other stresses quickly snowballed into burnout. They took their vacation time to spend time with family and recovery. They are currently on Special Assignment in Wyoming and seeking God's will for their next steps.

Lucas and Jamie Orner – God has been shuffling our ministry around in Krasnoyarsk over the past year. We feel strongly that He is using this time for us to make preparations for adding new team members and continuing to facilitate ministry opportunities. We recently started attending a new church plant, later to find out that the pastor's desire is to eventually open a Missionary Training Center in association with the church's building plans. We are excited about this opportunity to be a part in planning this as we have been praying for the past couple years that God would open an opportunity to disciple and engage the Russian churches to reach the least reached in Siberia.

Ted and Kate Mole – Ted continues his work with New Hope Counseling Center in Alaska (to which he is seconded). He has one final requirement to fulfill to receive the drug and alcohol recovery certification he is pursuing. Ted and Kate had hoped to travel to Russia in January, but were unable to get the time off work from the Center.

In the Pipeline – Frankie Emrick has been in the process of completing requirements that came out of his interviews and we hope that by the end of the year that he will be making plans toward support-raising. Of the students who spent time serving in Krasnoyarsk this summer, a few expressed real interest in returning to Siberia someday, but also admitted that it would not be in the near future because of finishing school, paying off debt, and life plans. This year, I will be sending out a quarterly email to a list of people who have served in Russia short-term or expressed interest in Russia to keep the field on their minds and keep them up-to-date with how God is working in Siberia.

### Other News

New Russian Laws- A new law went into effect that adds a Russian language exam to the requirement for applying and renewing a residency permit. While all of our current team could easily pass this exam, it confirms our plan to have new team members spend their first year solely in language study. And while on student visas they may not participate in ministry.

Russian Economy- Most economists agree that Russia is in for a tough year. In a period of six months the value of the Russian ruble fell from 1 USD to 35 RUB to 1 USD to 65 RUB. For our team, the plus side is that the USD cost of most food and services has dropped by 25-35%, even

with high inflation. The only downside is the value of Russian property which was lost 40% of its value in USD. For most Russians they feel the strain of the economy but are not in panic mode, yet. Russians still have a memory of what it is like to barely get by, unlike most Westerners. We are praying that during this tough economic time, that God would use peoples' insecurities to draw them to unshakeable hope. We are praying that this crisis brings revival!

Stepping back from Transformational Development- For years, Scott Gilbert faced frustration because the small businesses that VZ was assisting to start were running into problems. Part of the reason Scott started the pine nut business was to be example of how a successful business can operate. Of course, that did not turn out as ideally as he had hoped. The truth of the matter is that there is a good reason that many large Western businesses do not invest/open in Russia. I feel that for us to invest in a BAM (Business As Mission) venture at this time would be unwise. We do plan to continue to partner and support VZ, but we are no longer recruiting toward BAM.

Sanctions and Vzaimidestvie (VZ)- Last year, after sanctions were imposed on the second wave of Russian banks, we were no longer able to transfer monthly financial support to VZ. VZ Director, Natasha Olenika, has tried several times to switch the organizations bank without success. So far she is planning on waiting out the sanctions. It is normal for Russians to go months without receiving their salary.

English Teaching Ministry- God's methods always surprise me! It doesn't surprise me that English club ministry is popular in Russia, but the fact that it is fruitful does continue to surprise me. Over the past few years God has been using these clubs in various churches in the city of Krasnoyarsk to bring people to an understanding of the gospel. We would like to recruit people who are not only interested in teaching English, but also in intentional discipleship. I am working on position descriptions, strategies and a philosophy of using that ministry to benefit not only the local Russian churches but how it could also be used among Native people groups.

### **Prayer and Praise**

- Pray for more workers in Siberia. Pray that we are able to sustain the interest of students who serve in the summer and then return to the US.
- Praise God for the 5+ years that the Gilberts served in Siberia. There was noticeable impact through their ministry in Tuva and other areas. Pray that God would direct their next steps.
- Pray for Shawna's health. She continues to struggle with medical issues.
- Pray that God would direct our steps with the Missionary Training Center as it is in the planning/dreaming phase.
- Praise the Lord for His provision in the Orner family's life and ministry. Their oldest son Sam, finished the first semester of first grade in Russian school and is loving it! Pray that God directs our family in which ministries to pursue in Krasnoyarsk.
- Pray for wisdom for the Moles as they prepare for the next stage in their ministry.
- Pray that God would work in the lives of people in Russia, that this economic situation would bring many people to Christ.

### **Conclusion**

Looking back at 2014, there were many highs and lows, but what I am enthusiastic about is where God has been opening doors over the last few months and affirming InterAct's ministry in Siberia. In addition to current ministries, I sense that God is using this upcoming year for a lot of foundation work for future ministry opportunities and receiving new team members.

Joyfully Serving Christ!  
Lucas Orner  
Russia Field Team Leader