

## Nonprofit organization giving help to the helpers

Susan Gvozdias

Central Penn Business Journal Staff  
11/4/2005

Russian psychologists had just finished several weeks of training at Keystone Human Services in Harrisburg last year when Chechen rebels stormed a school in Beslan and took hundreds of people hostage.

The psychologists flew back to Russia as the siege began Sept. 1, 2004. Two days later, the situation ended in a firefight and explosions that killed more than 300 people, nearly half of them children.

Keystone was one of the first nonprofit organizations to respond with assistance. It sent volunteers to Moscow to train psychologists and psychiatrists who were treating survivors. As many of the emergency, one-year grants and programs end, Keystone wants to make sure counselors have the financial and emotional support to continue to counsel victims and their families.

Keystone officials were scheduled to visit Moscow the week of Oct. 31 to set up a nonprofit arm to process money it raises for the effort, said Dennis Felty, president of Keystone. He also wants to make sure the organization does not duplicate established efforts.

"We're going to meet people and make connections," Felty said. "We're at the very early stages of learning international fundraising."

Post-communist Russia lacks a well-developed social-services system that offers mental-health services and help to the disabled, said Charles Hooker III, senior vice president of Keystone. Psychologists and psychiatrists are awarded degrees in a field that provides few jobs. The few that are available pay salaries that barely cover expenses, he said.

Keystone wants to help mental-health professionals set up a comprehensive treatment center in Beslan that could provide long-term care for survivors, their families and others who have suffered psychologically from the attack. Felty estimates that type of center could cost \$50,000 a year.

Keystone applied for a grant from the Open World Program to bring a group of Russian counselors to Harrisburg the week of Oct. 17. The Library of Congress program sponsors 10-day trips for Russian officials to learn how the private and nonprofit sectors handle social needs. The counselors attended seminars on post-traumatic stress disorder and visited organizations that help the mentally ill and disabled. The group's members shared their experiences of a harrowing year of helping survivors regain control of their lives.

The crisis that hit Beslan did more than just overwhelm the few mental-health facilities available in the town in southern Russia. It also sent waves of fear throughout the region. Beslan is a two-hour drive to Grozny, the capital of Chechnya, a breakaway republic fighting a brutal war for independence. Many fear that the terrorists might launch similar attacks in their cities. Residents of cities surrounding Beslan are starting to display nervous ticks and other signs of post-traumatic stress, said Diana Guluyeva, a child psychiatrist visiting from Beslan. She handled many of the first victims who came to the city's main hospital.

She had to sedate many of the children to get them to sleep.



Russian interpreter Valery Yegorov, standing, translates for four Russian counselors as they describe their experiences helping those affected by a massacre at a Beslan school in September 2004. From left are Lyudmila Kallagova, Madina Sosranova, Diana Guluyeva and Vladimir Morozov. The counselors spoke at a Keystone Human Services seminar last month as part of Open World Program, sponsored by the Library of Congress. Photo/Lizzie Heard

“They were screaming,” Guluyeva said through an interpreter. “They were crying, and they were refusing to believe that their parents were gone.”

In the first few months after the attack, she saw 20 to 30 patients a day. Guluyeva has 200 patients ages 2 to 18.

A year later, survivors still have nightmares, anxiety, depression and other emotional problems. Many children who had improved throughout the year relapsed on their first day of school in September, Guluyeva said.

“Kids came back and realized half of their class is not there,” she said. “So they have these recurring fears, and everything is the same.”

Madina Sosranova, a Beslan psychologist who counsels mainly adults, said through an interpreter that it is hard to convince adults that they and their families need counseling. Russians have not embraced mental-health services as much as Americans have, she said. Sosranova said she is concerned about the first responders, many of whom have not received counseling.

Keystone received \$20,000 in grants to train Russian psychologists in Harrisburg in April, Felty said. Another group is scheduled to arrive in mid-November. Keystone’s top priority is to help Sosranova and others obtain grants and funding.

“A good salary for a psychiatrist is \$250 a month,” Hooker said. “So that’s very doable.”

Sosranova said the psychological suffering could last for generations.

“Research shows that in traumas like this, the implications manifest themselves over 20 years, so we are in this long-term,” she said.

---

### **At a glance**

Keystone Human Services

Headquarters: Harrisburg

About the agency: A nonprofit organization that manages a group of social-service agencies. The agencies provide mental-health services, assistance for the physically disabled, and homes for those with mental retardation and autism. Keystone Human Services International is one of Keystone’s newest agencies. It is developing social-services programs in Moldova and Russia.

Management: Dennis Felty, president

Revenue: \$74.6 million in fiscal year 2003

Net assets: \$10.7 million in fiscal year 2003

Source: Keystone Human Services Annual Report