

For Immediate Release
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Contact: Ann Moffitt CFRE
717-232-7509 ext. 133
amoffitt@kss.org

Mission In Moscow

Keystone Human Services provides training and consultation to Russian Psychologists doing heroic work in response to the Beslan Massacre

(Harrisburg 11-30-04) “We could see the pain, overwhelming sorrow and exhaustion in their faces,” said Ann Tapman, clinical social worker with Capital Area Head Start, a Program of Keystone Human Services (KHS). She was referring to the ten mental health professionals who came to Moscow recently to learn post trauma techniques for dealing with the aftermath of the horrors of the Beslan massacre.

At the request of Russian children’s service experts familiar with Keystone’s experience in trauma intervention and disaster planning, Keystone deployed a team of specialists to assist local professionals responding to the crisis. The team included Ann Tapman, Connie Kennedy, a trauma specialist from Keystone Children & Family Services’ Student Assistance Program and Dennis Felty, President of KHS.

Over a period of two weeks from October 15 –28th, Keystone’s crisis specialists provided training and one-on-one consultation with Beslan psychiatrists and psychologists. In addition, an intensive four-day training session was conducted utilizing curriculum developed by Keystone’s dedicated team. Over forty other mental health professionals from Moscow joined the original participants in attending the training to improve their own resources for response to crises in the schools. Felty states “It was a great privilege working with our colleagues from Beslan, they are doing heroic work in a very difficult situation. We look forward to working together to create an adequate counseling resource for the children and families of Beslan.”

Much of the trauma counseling material was translated in advance into Russian so participants would have extensive reference information. Additionally lectures were translated from English to Russian.

Even with all the careful preparation, Connie Kennedy had her own interpretation of the communication challenges. “A smile and a hug are the same no matter what country you live in,” she observed. “People were so visibly moved that we bothered to come.” Clearly, the entire Russian contingent was deeply gratified by the compassion and initiative exhibited through this shared endeavor.

Drawing from their vast experience, Keystone placed a decided emphasis on “helpers helping helpers.” Frequently, research has shown that those providing trauma services neglect their own needs while addressing the needs of others. In this case, counselors in Beslan had been working for forty days without any relief.

Although it will take years, perhaps even an entire generation, for the people of Beslan to heal from a trauma of this magnitude, they fear they will soon fade from the hearts and minds of concerned citizens world-wide.

“Their need for on-going assistance is paramount,” urges Dennis Felty. “The global community must not forget ... Once a parent has to identify their beloved child from tatters of clothing, it creates a wound that lasts a lifetime. Unfortunately, there are no simple solutions to loss of this scope and scale.”

“This was a life-altering experience,” commented Ann Tapman. It is our hope that by instilling the value of volunteerism, the Beslan community can help heal their children as they heal themselves.”

Keystone is a 501c3 non-profit organization. Donations from the community are critical to help cover the considerable costs associated with this humanitarian endeavor. The generosity of Americans is deeply appreciated. Donations, including secure online donations, may be forwarded to Keystone Human Services, 124 Pine Street, Harrisburg, PA, 17101. Further information is available at www.keystonehumanservices.org or by calling (717) 232-7509, ext. 133.

