

Finland 2004



An Account Of The Project Undertaken By

The Second Chance Charity

For Children Who Need Special Help

Second Chance House, Somers Road Bridge, Portsmouth, Hants PO5 4NS

Telephone 02392 872790. Email second.chance@ukonline.co.uk Web Page <http://www.second-chance.org.uk>

Registered Charity Number 1001462

INTRODUCTION

During 1999 we had an idea that we would like to do something a bit special and different for our youngsters to mark the year 2000 and the new millennium.

Ever since The Iron Curtain came down we had been doing, in a small way, some consultancy and back up work for The Salvation Army in their programme of care for the street children in some of Russia's big cities. This had necessitated various trips through Finland to reach the Russian Border. Each trip brought with it more and more contact with the people of Finland, one family in particular The Sundqvist's introduced our Chief Executive, Doug Hulme to not only the Finnish countryside but also some of its life and culture. Each visit brought about new revelations and new friends.

So it was that on one occasion in 1998 Harri & Annika Sundqvist took Doug to a place of historic interest. It was a log cabin, a fishing lodge beside the Kymi River at Langinkoski, near The City of Kotka in Southern Finland. This however was no ordinary fishing lodge, for it was built and belonged to the Last Tsars of Russia. It was here that Tsar Alexander would retreat with his family and just a few servants to a kind of 'Good Life'. He retreated from his palaces in Russia where he had over 10,000 servants and was surely the most privileged and powerful man to have ever lived in Europe. He was accompanied by his son Csar Nicholas 11 who was to become so infamously the last member of the Romanoff family to rule Russia when he was executed by the new communist regime in 1918. It was easy to see why the Tsar should choose Langinkoski for his retreat, he had a passion for Salmon fishing and woodwork. Here was an amazingly beautiful spot, a junction pool with rapids below and sylvan glides above. Here he could feel safe and indulge his interests, even the Tsarina would take part in this retreat by actually cooking in the kitchen, an amazing event for someone so privileged with so many servants.

The City Council of Kotka have preserved the lodge in exact detail, just as it was when the last Tsar was there, even the original furniture and carpets were carefully preserved and stored during troubled times and are now there for visitors to touch and soak up the feeling of historical wealth. It was stood on the very banks of the very river the Tsars fished that Doug was filled with a moment of inspiration. Wouldn't it be great if we could bring some of our children to explore & fish this place. The least privileged children in Europe following in the footsteps of the most privileged ever. An ironic (if presumptuous) thought fell into Doug's mind, 'Where Communism had failed, Second Chance succeeds'!



Thus the seed was sewn, a pilot project was set up and in 1999 a group of 6 children and 2 staff (who were also former clients) accompanied by a photographer and reporter explored the practicalities of a short visit to this area. They were the guests of Kotka City Council and their public relations officer a lovely lady called Sirkka Kotola, Sirkka was to prove an invaluable aid in the year to come and was instrumental in introducing the charity to the director of fishing for the area, Sakari Seppala, who also in his professional life was a senior officer of the city council. The visit was a resounding success, fish were caught, new experiences encountered and much valuable work was done with the young people. Thus the scene was set for the Millennium Project. Such was the success of that project that it has become a permanent feature of the Charities Calendar. The City Council through the efforts of Sakari Seppala found us the most perfect location which we have been able to

lease. Finnair, Silja Lines & Scandlines have all played their part to set up this the 4th year of residential courses in Finland.

THE FACILITIES

The charity needed a base in the middle of the Finnish countryside to carry out the full potential of the project, a visit to the Tsars Fishing Lodge was the seed for the idea but no basis for several days activities. The fishing was limited in style and space at the lodge and the historical relevance of it was of only minimal value to our youngsters (although we did forget Anastasia had stayed at the lodge and so Walt Disney did a great deal to enhance our visits to Langinkoski!!). Back in 1999 Sakari & Sirkka went to work on the problem of a venue and what happened proved to be nothing short of spectacular.

Kotka City council owned a cottage/log cabin beside the Baltic Sea and close to the estuary of the great Kymioki Salmon river. Although buried deep in the Finnish countryside it was also still quite close to the City and a short ride in a mini bus brought all sorts of civilised benefits and access to facilities that would otherwise have required a long drive for. This then leads us to ...

NIINILAHTI

The name of our cottage is Niinilahti which means Rush Bay or Bass bay. The use of the word bay is very accurate, because the cottage occupies a peninsula, an area of land completely 'ours' with a small bay opening out into the Baltic on one side and a much bigger and much more sheltered bay on the other side. The shelter meant that no matter how bad the weather, the youngsters could swim, fish and boat in it. A short row across the open end of the bay brought you to a 'secret' beach, accessible only from the sea or the deep impenetrable forest behind.

The facilities are made up out of separate buildings. There is the cottage with living facilities such as a kitchen and living



room with two bedrooms above. There is a bunk house for the youngsters sleeping up to ten, there is an excellent Sauna 'cottage' that was to prove a real education for the children, this has its own jetty taking the walker out into the bay, there were also the toilets and log store a little way away (an interesting feature bearing in mind the earth closet nature of the toilets!!). All the buildings are made of wood and are sited amongst the natural woodland and vegetation of our peninsula. It is a truly idyllic setting and certainly way beyond anything that a young person from a deprived inner city background could ever contemplate.

OUR AIMS

As most of the readers of this report will know we use the sport of angling to communicate with our children, it is an excellent medium for getting to know them and deliver a support package without them or their families feeling too much the victims of condesention. The fishing as most people will know is exceptional in Finland and so a good deal of emphasis was put on going fishing, indeed that is what all the youngsters thought they had come to do. The cottage is about 20 miles from the Russian Border and so the close proximity of this great country was used as an educational element.

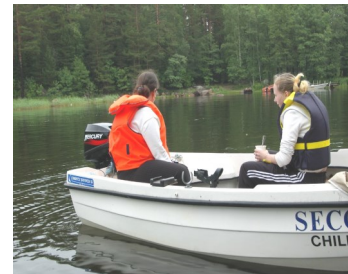
In a residential week of this nature there is a huge amount of work that can be accomplished with our children. They take the opportunity that comes with deepened friendships to share their thoughts and impart what has been or is happening in their lives, they seek advice and are much more open and amenable to gentle pushes in direction. Social Awareness training is one of the main objectives as for many of them it will be a new concept but one that will be of great necessity as they grow up and take their place in society.



It cannot be emphasised enough how good it has been to take these children into an environment they don't know about. Street wise 'cocky' young men rapidly lose that stance as they realise they are in a foreign environment, miles from home, the natives speaking another language, not knowing what's coming out of the woods next, where the nearest shop is or even of any kind of route home. In this situation they simply have to lower the barriers and veneer they have erected and work with the staff looking after them. The results of working in this environment have been really quite remarkable compared with what happens in their home environment.

In an educational and opportunistic framework the project offered a number of notable 'firsts' for almost every single youngster.

- ✓ the first time abroad
- ✓ the first time to fly
- ✓ the first time to eat in a restaurant
- ✓ the first time to take a Sauna
- ✓ the first time to light & cook on and outdoor fire
- ✓ the first time to observe the stars (June & July excepted in Finland!!)
- ✓ the first time to swim in a lake
- ✓ the first time to experience someone speaking another language
- ✓ the first time to learn to live within a group of people



The list is almost endless. To many of us it may be difficult to accept but they lack any experience or education in a number of areas.

- * How to use a knife & fork & eat properly
- * Why & How we wash and keep our bodies clean
- * How to cook
- * How to talk to people
- * (With apologies) How to wipe your bottom (we promise you this is true!!).

These are all skills which have never been learnt properly. We have not so far been able to devise or think of a better environment for addressing these issues than that which we have created at Niinilahti.

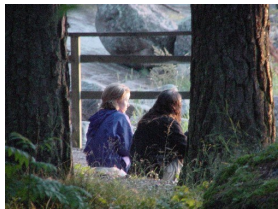
THE RESULTS

What we achieved with the young people is truly amazing. The results are beyond our expectations. All our targets previously outlined were met (and with some style) difficult children became co-operative, children that relied on medication to moderate their behaviour patterns forgot their medication and were still able to participate fully and learn lots. Young people opened up and told staff things that reduced hardened staff to tears, fish were caught, success was enjoyed and these youngsters will retain the memory of long hazy summer days spent in the company of good friends fishing in a little bit of utopia.



There were many stories to tell both amusing and moving and the talk between staff and volunteers has been full of them

throughout the autumn. The situation of Niinilahti allowed Our Chief Executive the luxury of replying to one of the children who had threatened to abandon the week and walk home 'go on then - there's the gate, it'll be a good trick if you can pull it off!' not the reply the child was expecting or would normally have got. His situation rapidly dawned on him and he was back happily playing with his peers within half an hour, with heart to heart discussions completed successfully!!



On one memorable occasion a Moose wandered into the peninsula and the youngsters were able to take photographs of it from behind trees but very close.

At the top of the ruined lighthouse (unfortunately destroyed by the British Navy!!) they could look down into Russia. The 24 hours of daylight that some of the groups enjoyed was really something beyond anyone's comprehension. Shopping was memorable and it was a delight to see how well most of the youngsters adapted and learnt. The list of achievements is endless and these pages are not enough to list them all.

THANKYOU



We took about 40 young people in groups of 6 -14 from Monday to Friday each week. They are all part of our charity and benefit from 52 weeks a year care from us. It was once again such a success that we are under intense pressure from all quarters, children, schools, social workers to run it or something like it next year. The financial support of our Trustee Charlie Savill made it all possible along with the fantastic service and support we received from Finnair who were so patient and sympathetic for our youngsters needs and whose financial and moral support were a credit to their company. Other back up support from Silja Line and Scandlines was vital and of course without our hosts Kotka City Council it would not have happened. What a wonderful nation are the Finns!

Such is the impact and usefulness of this exercise that we want to use it even more and we are currently exploring plans to buy a facility for our exclusive use, which would open up the possibility of extended use, visits in the winter, leases to help meet upkeep costs etc. Unfortunately the facilities at Niinilahti would appear not to be for sale (for what we could afford anyway) we have found another possibility that might just be available to us for much less - we are hoping someone will help us with this aspiration?

We believe we are changing the world... one child at a time, what an amazing place to do it in!

The Chief Executives Desk August 2004



Our Youngsters Fishing In Front of The Cottage at 11pm - Could it get any better?