



## Street and At-risk Youth Programs in Russia

August 2007

Since 1994, Doctors of the World-USA (DOW) has been working to address one of the more devastating consequences of the collapse of the Russian economy and its social institutions - the crisis of street and at-risk children and youth. The United Nations estimates that at least 10-16,000 children spend some, if not all, of their time on the streets of St. Petersburg. Many of these children suffer from malnutrition, respiratory and skin infections, other infectious diseases, pneumonia, and other illnesses associated with life on the streets. Related problems include substance abuse, depression, developmental disabilities from neglect and abuse, and trauma from sexual and/or physical abuse. Most children exhibit poor self-image, behavioral problems, and delays in social and intellectual development.



The long-term options provided by the medical and psychosocial system for street and at-risk children and youth are limited. If they are not sent to criminal detention centers, these children are likely to end up in shelters or orphanages. The damage done to children in these institutions is evidenced in these 1997 statistics: of the 15,000 teenagers in Russia who left orphanages at age 18, 10% ended their own lives, 20% returned to the street, and 33% ended up in prison.

### **Community and Family-based Alternatives to Life on the Street or Institutionalization**

The aim of DOW's programming in Russia is to provide innovative, replicable, community-based services to Russia's street and at-risk children and to strengthen Russian commitment and capacity to provide such services as an alternative to the institution-based child welfare system. The goals of the program are to:

- **Prevent homelessness and institutionalization**
- **Restore family support to street children and adolescents and to those in institutions**
- **Preserve the physical and mental health of street and at-risk children and adolescents**
- **Empower at-risk youth to lead healthy and productive lives**

To achieve these goals, DOW initiated holistic, child-centered interventions at critical points of entry: in at-risk homes, on the street, in children's centers, and in service sites jointly implemented with government partners as outlined below. Since 1994, **DOW's projects have provided critical services to more than 7,000 neglected, runaway or abandoned children and youth** in St. Petersburg.

### **Drop-In Centers for Youth** DOW first opened a Drop-In Center in 2002 to serve the population of children and youth lacking the official registration needed to access vital care services in St. Petersburg.



Drop-In Center staff provides these children with essential medical, psychosocial, and legal support services in an environment that affirms their dignity and encourages their self-motivation. At Drop-In Centers, children and youth clients are engaged in programs designed to ultimately place them into a family home, vocational program, or enable them to live independently as an adult. Drop-In Center staff also work with at-risk families to support them in providing a nurturing environment for their children.

Multidisciplinary case management, a new approach in Russia, is the core service approach utilized. In a unique partnership with the city administration, a second Drop-In Center was opened in Frunzensky District in 2005 with city support and staffing. This Drop-In Center is open seven days a week, including holidays, to ensure ongoing access to care and to build stronger relationships with clients. Both Drop-In Centers provide educational, recreation, cultural, and group-work activities to clients, and offer vocational consultations and access to vocational training programs.

**Overnight Shelter** In partnership with Frunzensky District, in early 2007 DOW opened an Overnight Shelter alongside its Frunzensky Drop-In Center. This facility provides around the clock contact with street and at-risk children and youth and thus plays a critical role in affecting high-risk behavior and enabling early interventions. By providing safe accommodation, meals, hygiene, and emergency counseling and medical care, the shelter meets urgent needs while encouraging participation in regular Drop-In Center programs. In its first six months of operation, 74 adolescents benefited from these services, including 36 who were confirmed as HIV-positive and were being assisted in registration at the City AIDS Center.

**Halfway House** In early 2007, DOW also opened a Halfway House for street and at-risk children and youth to assist them to transition away from homelessness or unhealthy living situations to independent living or appropriate family placement. Through client-centered case management, Halfway House residents are provided with training in life and work skills, educational support and tutoring, psychological counseling, access to medical care and to drug or alcohol rehabilitation, legal support, and other services. During their period of residence at the Halfway House, DOW staff work to secure a stable housing placement for the client and, wherever feasible or beneficial, work towards family reunification.

**HIV/AIDS Services** In partnership with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, DOW conducted an HIV survey among street youth in St. Petersburg in 2006. In response to the alarming 37.4% HIV prevalence revealed through this survey, DOW has launched a multifaceted program of HIV prevention, testing, care, support, and access to treatment. Through collaboration with a network of providers in St. Petersburg, this project is increasing access to voluntary counseling and testing, reducing barriers to care, and providing critical and targeted HIV prevention information and services. In addition to reaching clients on the street with HIV/AIDS services through an outreach van and team, DOW has integrated HIV/AIDS services into all of its projects including the Drop-In Centers, Overnight Shelter, and Halfway House.



**Foster Family Support** In 2000, DOW launched a program to support the nascent foster care system in St. Petersburg as an alternative to children's institutionalization, significantly expanding the city's previous activities. DOW assists public and private shelters in screening and placing children into the homes of foster parents who are recruited, screened, trained, and supported throughout the placement by DOW staff. Over 200 children have been placed with foster families through this project to date.

**Public-Private Partnership** Through all of its projects, DOW focuses on establishing public-private partnerships that ensure government and community support and thereby the sustainability of services. DOW has worked closely with the city and local administrations of Nevsky, Frunzensky, and Kalininsky Districts of St. Petersburg to establish and co-implement service programs and sites for street and at-risk children and youth with the ultimate goal of transferring operations to local government institutions for implementation. DOW is also replicating its Drop-In Center in Ukraine with government partners.

**Local Capacity Development** To ensure long-term improvement of services and care for at-risk children and youth, DOW has co-established the **Russian non-governmental organization (NGO) "Doctors to Children"** with which it co-implements its projects and which can carry on services in the long-term as a local provider. DOW has also provided numerous training programs to government and NGO service professionals on client-oriented approaches to service provision and other service methodologies.

**About Doctors of the World-USA (DOW)** Doctors of the World-USA is an international health and human rights organization founded in 1990 that is a member of the Doctors of the World/*Médecins du Monde* network which (combined) is active in 90 countries worldwide. Working with local partners in the U.S. and around the globe, DOW builds long-term solutions to health crises with a focus on: orphans and vulnerable children; women's health; HIV/AIDS and TB; and survivors of human rights abuses including torture and trafficking. DOW projects provide essential care and services and focus resources on training and building the capacity of local counterparts to ensure sustainability. To learn more visit [www.doctorsoftheworld.org](http://www.doctorsoftheworld.org)