



## Empowering Russia's Most Vulnerable Children and Young People

### General Information on Love's Bridge Projects

#### **What do we do?**

Please see our website for the latest information about Love's Bridge projects.

Love's Bridge works together with the Perm charity Zashita, which is officially registered in Perm. Love's Bridge is a registered charity in the USA. All LB activities are carried out jointly with Zashita, and the projects are one and the same.

#### **Who do we need?**

Volunteers would ideally have some experience with difficult children, or at least be able to demonstrate capability in this field of work. The ideal volunteer would have the following characteristics: flexibility, excellent social skills, creativity, desire to learn about a new culture, motivation, desire to travel, organizational skills, patience and tact, a sense of responsibility, the desire to help those who have less opportunities in life, an easy going nature.

All of our staff work in Russian, and there are very few people who speak English here. We require that our volunteers make the effort to learn Russian during their stay here, as we will not be able to provide an interpreter. We can help volunteers find a Russian teacher and can guarantee plenty of language practice. Volunteers can get involved in a variety of activities, including:

- Arts and crafts
- Sports activities
- Cinema and theatre trips
- Mentoring program
- Organization of special events
- Getting involved in publicity work
- Outdoor activities (camping, rafting, picnics, excursions)
- Social work (visiting individuals at home, on the streets or in institutions)

Volunteers are not expected to work for a specific number of hours a week, but are encouraged to establish a fixed timetable and stick to it.

We welcome new ideas for activities and mini projects and encourage volunteers to share their skills and ideas with staff and kids

#### **What are our kids like?**

Many of the young people we work with have had extremely difficult experiences in their lives, and this reflects on their behavior in many different ways. Working with these kids can often be difficult, but also extremely fulfilling and rewarding if you are willing to give them your time and care! The general age group of our kids is between 10-21, although many of the young people in our care look and act a lot younger than their age, or sometimes are forced to grow up a lot quicker than they should have to.

Every child who comes to us is treated as an individual, and encouraged to develop at their own pace. This means that sometimes we wait years to see even tiny changes in behaviour and attitude, but this is a vital part of the process of making life long changes. Do not expect to see great changes during your time

volunteering, and treat every day as a new day with the kids, and you will feel much more satisfaction in your work!

Be aware that some of the older teenagers in our care may be HIV positive or have various infectious diseases as a result of living on the streets. Spending time in the centers with groups of children may make you prone to catching coughs and colds. Support your immune system well while volunteering, particularly in the spring.

Some of the children and teenagers in our care may for the first period be wary or non-communicative with you. Don't let this put you off – be active and enthusiastic in your interaction with them and they will respond once they are comfortable with you. Please try to maintain a level of professionalism with the kids in the centre, remember that you are there to provide an example and encourage the children and teenagers to make positive changes in their lives.

Although we do not expect volunteers to play an active role in discipline or conflict resolution, we do expect you to tell us of any incidents you see and remind the kids of the rules we all follow and behaviour we expect in the centre. If you should find yourself in the middle of a conflict, argument or fight between the children, bring it straight to the attention of the staff or coordinators. **Never** try to discipline a child on your own.

### **What are our staff like?**

For all volunteers playing an active role in the project, developing good relations with the staff (and volunteers!) is just as important as developing good relations with the kids. Our staff come from a variety of backgrounds both educationally and professionally and share widely varying viewpoints on all aspects of our work. This, combined with a relatively stressful and energy consuming working environment, results in disagreements and conflicts, which we always try to resolve peacefully and constructively. If you have any problems with staff you should immediately talk to a project coordinator. We can listen to your problems as a minimum (quite often you might want to just get things off your chest!) and if necessary take further action. Try to remain relaxed and open-minded with the staff – they may have opinions or attitudes which surprise or frustrate you as someone from the “West”, and Russians also have quite specific cultural differences which sometimes make things interesting when working together with foreigners.

On the other hand, all of our staff are dedicated to the task in hand, and will be able to share with you a wealth of knowledge, experience and enthusiasm in working with the children at Love's Bridge. The better relations you develop with staff, the better overall experience you will have in the project, so go out of your way to get to know the staff – take an active role in organizational meetings, staff training days, recreational activities.

For more detailed information on our staff please see the document “current staff”.

### **Living in Perm**

Volunteers will be fully supported and assigned a mentor from the Love's Bridget team (if necessary with someone who speaks some English). Volunteers will be offered training and consultations on working with our kids, and will be working in a team with the Russian staff and volunteers. We can help volunteers find appropriate accommodation, and strongly advise that volunteers rent rooms in Russian families to help with language and culture adaptation.

Life in Russia is far from straightforward, and volunteers experience ups and downs on a daily basis. The weather and city itself can be very oppressive and exhausting, as can speaking Russian all day, working with challenging situations and constantly adapting to what is going on around. All in all you should expect to tire quickly in the first few months, and you should take particular care of your physical and emotional health. Allow yourself adequate rest and do not spread yourself too thin! We need healthy and happy volunteers who can give the project all their energy!

Any problems you have with adapting to life in Russia can be shared with staff or coordinators – don't be embarrassed to come and talk – we know what it's like and can at least give you a shoulder to cry on!

Perm is a large city with almost one million people, so you shouldn't get bored here. There are some great theatres, opera, ballet, cinema, plenty of bars and pubs and clubs. Generally, however, Russians spend time with friends at home round the kitchen table.

There is a wealth to enjoy outside of the city – Russians love the outdoors (although don't often look after it as they should), and many people go camping and rafting from May to November. In the winter people love skiing in the forests and there are even a few downhill slopes in the Ural mountains close by. Make the winter fly by faster by staying active and getting involved!

### **Other opportunities for volunteers**

Volunteers will have the opportunity to contribute to the developing charity sector in Russia, which is still in its infancy. We run a very individual project, which provides services for some of Russia's most needy young people. As a small young organization volunteers will be able to get involved in the life of the organization and really influence the kids in our care. For those interested in the social sector, psychology students, and other youth activists, this is an extremely valuable opportunity. Volunteers will be able to access training and other skills workshops during the course of their stay.

Volunteers at Love's Bridge are also encouraged to get involved in other youth organizations in the Perm region such as "Youth Memorial", where you can meet and socialize with lots of young and enthusiastic volunteers and take part in projects run by Memorial, sometimes jointly with LB.

Volunteers who want to earn some pocket money may well be able to find work teaching English privately.