

NEWS FROM LIVSLUST-DZIVESPRIEKŠ' HOME AND VOCATIONAL SCHOOL FOR ORPHANS AND OTHER EXPOSED YOUNGSTERS IN LATVIA

Social rehabilitation – the key to success

Soon 200 young people will have left Livslust to manage on their own. Since we keep in touch with them for a long time after they have left, we know that more than 80% of them live a normal life. By "normal" we mean that they have a place to live and a job or continue to study. Many have started their own family, often together with someone they met at Livslust. Our intention from the beginning was to teach the pupils a profession as a tool to self-support. We now realize that professional skills are not enough. You also have to be able to handle relations with other people at work and at home. Most of our pupils have psychological problems caused by a difficult childhood. Some of them have not been able to graduate from 9th grade and some have minor mental handicaps. As a consequence, social rehabilitation has taken on a more important role together with the vocational training. This operation consists of a package of activities with the purpose of improving the self-esteem and self-confidence of the pupils and to teach them how to handle relations and demands from work and family.

A safe environment. Personal development requires a safe environment, which is what the youngsters find at Livslust.



Getting settled. In August the new pupils arrive. Last September we received 22. For most of them Dzivespriekš is something completely different from the institutions they have experience so far, especially the open and trustful relationship between grown ups and pupils that prevails at the school. It takes time to get used to this new situation. Therefore, we have chosen to postpone the start of the studies until October and let September be a month of

adaptation. The older pupils are mentors for the new ones and the days are filled with activities with the purpose to create a feeling of home and safety. At the end of September everybody go on a bus-trip for a couple of days.



In September everybody went to Livani, Dauvgapils and Aglona in the east of Latvia. At one stop the pupils had a chance to dress up in historical costumes and get a taste of life in the 18th century.

Morning Circle. In order to maintain the important feeling of community and safety in the group, each day starts with a morning gathering directly after breakfast. All members of the staff and all the pupils sit down in a large circle and share how they feel. This is also an opportunity to discuss problems and talk about what will happen during the day.

Self-knowledge. The school's psychologist works with the pupils in groups as well as individually during their stay at the school. Most of them come from plain school institutions where they have not been motivated to further studies or personal development. Therefore, an important part of the work is about motivation to study and to wake a belief in the future. Individual talents, qualifications and dreams for the future govern the process to develop self-esteem and self- confidence. Last year music- and art-therapy were introduced with good results.

Life knowledge. Sooner or later everybody will have to face normal day-to-day issues in the society including different social situations. As one part of the preparation for this, we have introduced the subject Life-knowledge. It consists of hygiene, housework, family- and work-relations, knowledge of environment and general public functions.



Doctors teach the pupils about health, sexual matters, HIV/Aids and contraceptives; firemen teach about fire prevention; policemen warn of criminality and trafficking. We also invite former alcohol and drug addicts who share their experience and tell about the negative results of addiction.

Responsibility. The pupils learn to be responsible by fulfilling basic demands like to show up at set meetings and to be on time. Everybody shares the responsibility for the housework and each person keeps his or her clothes and living space clean and in order. The older pupils have other extended fields of responsibility in addition.

“The step-by-step-system”. A psychotherapist, the staff and the pupils have created a program in order to structure the process of personal development and to reward improvement. During their stay at the school, the pupils qualify along a scale of five steps. Evaluation is done three times a year by the staff together with representatives from the pupils’ council. There are some set criteria like hygiene, keeping the room in order, being on time, study results, social behaviour and treatment of peers and more. The 5th step can only be reached during the last year at the school. As you are moved to a higher step you get more responsibility, are allowed to be more independent and you also get a higher allowance. Nobody is automatically moved to a higher step. You have to fulfil the criteria.

Spare time. The pupils live at the school and of course that includes the spare time. Livslust provides many different activities like sports, aerobics, song and music, drama, art and handicraft, wood-work, computers, flower arrangement and much more. The pupils like to sing and play music or act before their friends or visitors to the school. All the birthdays of the month are jointly celebrated and sometimes there are disco-nights. Christmas and Easter are celebrated according to Latvian tradition and nowadays also Halloween. Every year there are several playful sports tournaments with participants from other schools, orphanages or sponsor companies. An anti-smoking-day is held in May every year with hikes and games in the nature around the school. In the summer there are barbecues in the garden or trips to some of the endless sand-beaches of Latvia. The older pupils can go for a couple of weeks to a family in Sweden or Germany. For most of the youngsters this is their first experience of normal family life.



Girls from the choir perform in front of a group of visitors.

Local geography, history and folklore. It is of great value to know your country. Excursions and study trips are arranged for the pupils to let them see different parts of Latvia and its nature. They visit historical sites on national celebration days and go to the theatre

and to concerts. This is a vital part of the social rehabilitation and a new experience to most of the pupils.

The Boys’ and the Girls’ Clubs. Girls and boys may have different kinds of problems and some issues are awkward for boys to discuss when there are girls present and vice versa. For that reason there is a Boys’ Club lead by headmaster **Edijs Petersons** and a Girls’ Club lead by social pedagogue **Gita Priede**. Here you are free to ventilate delicate subjects and discuss love and relations, happiness, lies and promises and much more. They use different methods like drawing and games and they work with development of empathy, emotions and identity.



To help others. For several years Livslust-Dzivesprieks has given aid to the orphanage Dzirciems, where most of the children have some kind of mental handicap. Matron **Mudite Neimane** and the Livslust pupils take care of this activity. The seamstress pupils have made curtains, blankets and pillow-cases to all the children. At Christmas Livslust pupils participate in the Christmas party at Dzirciems and hand out presents. Children from the orphanage come to Livslust for Easter. They are also invited to different sports games and other events. Our pupils like to help other children and we think it is important to learn both to give and receive.

Supervision and support for the staff

The staff of Livslust-Dzivesprieks is a well functioning team after many years of working together. They do a fantastic job. However, it is hard to care for a large group of teenagers with complications from a difficult childhood. They get much appreciated support and current supervision from psychotherapist **Viesturs Rudzitis**. He works with the members of the staff individually and in groups and he can assist when there is an especially difficult case. Headmaster **Edijs Petersons** is very happy to have this opportunity, which he means is invaluable in order for the staff to cope with their work.

Some of last years many visitors

“Childhood has supported Livslust since the year 2000. I visited the school for the first time on September 25th last year. The impression was that the youngsters were like most teenagers, which is very good, considering their difficult background. I can say this based on first hand experience from visits to many different institutions for children. Growing up at an institution often means that the children suppress their own identity. At Livslust the individuals take

place, they laugh and make noise and flirt. The rooms are decorated with personal items and the children are even frank enough to dare to complain that they don't get pizza. In short, children at Livslust are allowed to be children, or more correct, to be teenagers. What Livslust manages to create and offer to the youngsters during two or three years of their lives is of great significance to their future. What is most remarkable about Livslust is the results, that most of the boys and girls that leave the school live under orderly conditions, that their children in their turn won't have to go through the same tragic childhood, that the vicious circle is broken."

Gisela Ivarsson, project manager **World Childhood Foundation**

On September 5-6, the Swedish company **Essen** held a successful conference at the school in Aizupe. Essen has supported Livslust for many years, but this was the first time that a whole group from the company visited the school. **Maja Wetterberg** afterwards wrote in a mail: "We felt very welcome! Edijs and Liga are two wonderful persons who did their utmost to make our stay a success and to make us feel content. The food and the conference-room were more than good, everything we had asked for was there."



Members of the **Swedish Chamber of Commerce** are guided around the school by **Edijs Petersons** (to the far right). In the middle **Maria Cakste**, chairwoman of the **Latvian Livslust organisation Asociacija Dzivesprieks**.

The Swedish insurance company **Länsförsäkringar Kalmar län** had two staff seminars at the school on September 8 and 15 for almost 70 persons each time. They were very pleased with the arrangements and impressed by the activities at the school and especially by the commitment from headmaster **Edijs Petersons**. In order to show their appreciation the staff decided to donate last year's Christmas present from the company. The company added enough for the contribution to cover the cost 2008 for one more social pedagogue at the school.



Representatives from **Nordea Latvia**, sponsor from 2007, had a lot of fun on their visit on November 9. After teaching the pupils about bank services they themselves tested different handicraft under supervision of the pupils.

The following piece is by **Lena Lundgren** from **Friends of Livslust**, which is an organisation founded by the staff of **Electrolux**, Stockholm.

"Nine persons from **Electrolux** visited Aizupe on September 20-21. On the first evening we had dinner at the school. We appreciated the tasty food and the friendly and hospitable atmosphere. After spending the night at a nearby hotel we returned to the school, where **Liga Landisa** started by showing us a film about Livslust-Dzivesprieks and telling about the school and the way they work. We were shown the main building with living areas and school rooms and then the well equipped sewing workshop and carpentry. We met the pupils and some invited us to their rooms. During our short visit we all got a very positive view of the school. We were impressed to hear from **Liga** the way pupils are received, the purpose of their stay and what they do to have the staff cope with this demanding job. We experienced the atmosphere of the school to be warm and trusting and we realized what a commitment it takes to reach this. We would have liked to see more of the youngsters, but many of them were on the fields picking potatoes and the new pupils were occupied with activities which we could not take part in. On our way home we visited the orphanage **Dzirciems** and saw the difference between carrying out a task that has been imposed on you and to do it with commitment and passion. We hope that **Dzirciems** will learn from Livslust. We thank **Liga** and our driver who did everything to make our visit to Latvia a success."

Congratulations Edijs

The headmaster of the school, **Edijs Petersons**, celebrated his 40th birthday in October. When we first met Edijs he was a 27 years old sports teacher with a true interest in the development of children and young people. He is married with two daughters. He came to Livslust already in 1995, the year after the organisation was founded, in the middle of the renovation work which transformed the old hospital in Aizupe into a modern school building. Thus he has been involved during the whole building period and has had a great influence in the development of the operation. He has managed to win the trust of the pupils through his open attitude and he successfully leads the staff team of fourteen fulltime employees and several part time teachers. During the years Edijs has gained valuable experience of how to prepare exposed teenagers for an independent life. Today he has an important task to spread information about the methods of Livslust-Dzivesprieks to other schools and institutions.



Edijs and Livslust's patron **Queen Silvia** on one of her visits.

Company collaboration continues

The vocational education at Livslust-Dzivesprieks is successfully carried out together with company partners, who have taken on a long-term commitment. Consequently the education is in contact with the present market conditions of each profession. The companies give financial support and professional advice. They provide teachers and raw material as well as trainee jobs. Many of our former pupils are employed by the companies. Our present partners are **Snickers Workwear** (sewing); **Vairak Saules** (kitchen & restaurant) **Krasu Serviss** and **Knauf** (painting & surface treatment).

Our sewing teacher visits Stockholm

Our sewing teacher **Anta Birkensteina** went on a study trip to Stockholm at the end of September to get new inspiration. She was very pleased with her visits to **St. Görans High School**, **The Cutters Academy**, **Snickers Workwear** and **The Silk Mill**. At the **Quilt Station** in Roslags Näsby she saw a fast, digitalised sewing machine, which she means would be of great use in the production. Later Anta was happy to hear that **Snickers Workwear** has promised to donate such a machine to the school. We would like to thank **Christina Bonde** who organised the visit, **Gun von Krusenstjerna** and **Ingrid Jansons** who translated and to **Birgitta Persson** who helped in many ways.

Miscellaneous from second half of 2007

- 84 players took part in the **Charity Golf** for Livslust on September 3. The fee was a contribution to the school thanks to **Kungsängens Golf Club** who provided the golf-course for free and the rest of the sponsors of the day **Bravida**, **Champagne Pommery**, **Flow-dryck for golfers**, **Fly Nordic**, **Oriflame Cosmetics**, **Prosana**, **Rodem Reklam**, **SEB**, **Snickers Workwear**, **Vattenfall** and **Wine Partners**.
- Thanks to a grant from **EU's Structural Funds** we have begun to spread information about our work-methods to other institutions in Latvia.
- New collaboration partners from 2007 are **SEB Latvijas Unibanka** and the manufacturers of paint **Colorex Sweden** and **Tikkurila-Vivacolor**

- Latvia. **Femmes d'Europe** has donated machinery to the carpentry. From **Dzintars AB** we have received a minibus, from **Lemcon Latvija** a financial contribution and **Unilever Baltic** continues to donate cleaning and hygiene products.
- Everybody at the school and representatives from our partner **LMT** celebrated the annual **Harvest Party** on October 31. The event was sponsored by **AT Serviss**. Special guest was the popular Latvian artist **Rudolfs Plepis**.
- The school's **Christmas party** was on December 21 with a concert and theatre sketches performed by the pupils and a table filled with traditional Latvian food and sweets. Also former students were invited, some with their own children. Presents were donated by **Oriflame Latvia** and **Handelsbankens Fadderbarnsfond** and **Förenade Liv**, Sweden.



Edijs and Santa Claus hand out presents. To the right to Eidrina, daughter of former pupils Sintija Luomane and Janis Leitis.

How to support Livslust-Dzivesprieks

A gift to Livslust-Dzivesprieks is a gift to exposed children in Latvia. You can become a **PARTNER** with a long-term commitment, a **LIVSLUST-SPONSOR** and pay a monthly amount of your own choice or you can make a **SINGULAR DONATION** in connection with Christmas or other events. You can **HOST** a couple of our students in the summer. You can **BUY PRODUCTS** made in our workshops. Contact us for more information.

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Major contributing organisations 2008: EUs Structural Funds ESF, The Helge Ax:son Johnson Foundation, The Swedish Order of St. John, Radiohjälpen, The Sigrid Buch Foundation, World Childhood Foundation