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**November 07, 2007**  
**Strana.ru web-publication**  
**Moscow**

More and more Russian regions, especially those bordering with Southern countries, claim that drug addiction becomes the scourge of the society. But even more tragic is the fact the youth who try to resist drugs just do not know what to do with themselves. Certain opportunities for these young people are offered by organizers of the "Train to the Future" campaign, as Dmitry Arseniev, producer of this program, tells the Strana.ru.

- Dmitry, this year will be the fifth since the project "Train to the Future" crossed the country for the first time. How operates the organization that you supervise?

- For an entire year we organize local actions aimed at drug prevention in various Russian cities. These are small actions – performances, seminars. At the end of the year we held a final event: we choose a federal district, and in its main cities we organize large-scale activities. Their planning is quite simple: according to the federal target program, a route through federal districts is set up (and cities are recommended to us by the Federal Service for Control of Narcotics according to drug situation there). Thus, this year we had two federal districts – the Southern and the North-Western, and in their cities we organized a number of events even before the train went on the road. Then in September the "Train to the Future" went across precisely these two regions.

- People working with official structures are somewhat scared of these numbers of "actions", "events", "supportive governmental structures" that you mention. Let's be honest: for the most part such things suggest formality and inutility. What are your goals and to what extent are they achievable?

- It is completely incomprehensible, why are you scared by the word "action". And how else can we call what we do? A program, a festival, what else? Our project is called: "All-Russia Anti-Drugs Program", and it includes actions, seminars, festivals, tournaments, exhibitions, contests, theatrical performances, sports competitions. It includes everything.

As a matter of fact, what you said does actually happen, but the Train's objective is to unify various initiatives, including governmental ones. And our goal is to demonstrate to the government that indeed there is an initiative on this planet that successfully achieves its objectives of informally approaching these actions. In order to successfully implement everything we try to attract people who work with the youth, who really understand the problem, who can supply objective information and create trusting atmosphere.

Our objective is to try and make young people believe that today drugs are outdated, not interesting, not relevant, because there are indeed many more interesting things to do. We offer initiatives that create appropriate atmosphere – suggesting that you can find a way of life that lets you develop. We bring our offers to regions, but if there are local initiatives on site, sufficiently sound and interesting, we offer them to join our train next year.

- Such as?

- The entire "Train to the Future" consists of initiatives that were collected for five years. For example, Vadim Samoylov's "Hero of Our Times" is an independent initiative too, while next year we will have a joint action. That is, within the framework of the Train we will organize a concert

space called "Hero of Our Times", something like a rock festival on the train. In general, "Train to the Future" is a special initiative. No one was suggesting it from above, it was born as a grass-root initiative, by the people who were themselves involved in drugs, alcohol, chemical dependence, and who extricated themselves from all that. They have experienced that pain, lived through it, so they know how to work – what they call – in the field, with real people. They try sincerely to help kids avoid the problems that they had confronted, and they talk about these matters in a very accessible language. Not in the language of officials and various directives – because today it is already quite clear that narcologists admit their impotence. While to us people are listening, they understand us, we gather crowds. When we say that this is an anti-drugs action, everybody goes like: yeah, right, bees against honey. But after our events people leave feeling renewed. Many say: "Yes, perhaps today we heard something real and true". And the precondition for success is that we do not use anything that suggests prohibition. Even the term "anti-drugs" is used only to raise the action's format. We have four general platforms: education, culture, sports and spirituality. All our events are related to one or the other of them. If it is educational platform, we organize seminars, trainings, roundtable discussions for various target audiences. We have seminars on prevention of drug addiction and on rehabilitation for priests and staff of religious organizations, because today they are trying to do some work in our area, and we organize excellent seminars for them.

For the media we have a seminar called "Special Force PR" – where we do not actually teach journalists how to write, but we have information for them, and our own perspective. We often organize media competitions to make them interested in attending our seminars.

- Looks to good to be true...

- Well, we have some bottlenecks what we keep thinking about a right approach to them. The most complicated point is when ex-addicts speak about their past and the way to get out of that situation, to avoid making it sound an easy thing to do. But we always say: kids, we are not the rule, we are exceptions, there are very few people like us. While the rule is like that – are we show them rough consequences. Although, here we to say right away that they have a choice, there are alternatives, and we show them these alternatives. And we offer right away things like graffiti, or paintball, or cart races, or extreme sports, or bike trial. We organize 40 events in four days. That is, we cover an entire city.

- But there is one more group – people who are not just drug addicts, but also HIV infections. They should actually have a separate program designed for them. As well as for the people who live with them.

- We position our Train as a selfless movement for promoting healthy life style. But among our participants and organizers there is a group of volunteers who come to work for free. This year thirty volunteers traveled with us, and six of them are HIV infections. And they are among the most active kids.

In terms of HIV and AIDS prevention we collaborated with international program called "Dance life", and our volunteers were trained by that program. So we designed a special seminar. We pay much attention to this, we meet people who have to deal with HIV in the field. And volunteers spread their energy, their attitude to those kids who come to us to talk about their situation.

- Good, it all sounds so neat. And you tell about it so compellingly. Although in general it somehow reminds of these Protestant missionaries – they arrive for a visit, do some work, achieve some results, even set some people to the right path – and then they leave, and people have to continue their living in our reality with their newly acquired knowledge.

- I agree, I know what you mean. You are absolutely right; circus leaves the town, but something must remain. This is why we create regional headquarters in the field that collaborate with us all the time while we prepare our events, so we can see objectively how active are these organizations. And if they demonstrate good results, they become our regional representatives and receive a very good bonus from us. We start close cooperation with them, and people in the city understand: "Aha, these kids work with the Train, they have good connections there, they can organize many things fast". Besides, there are very many regional organizations, that after working with us, received local grants because we gave them the right positioning in the eyes of regional or city administrations.

Moreover, we are indeed taking care of individual people who are chemically dependent: a team of consultants – certified gestalt therapists – travels with us. They are all ex-addicts, who were trained in international programs for educating and rehabilitating drug addicts (some were trained in London, some in Poland, etc), and they establish various rehabilitation programs across Russia. And if we see that after our consultations that some people are more motivated for rehabilitation, for freeing themselves from this addiction, we pay for them going to a free rehab for a whole year. For example, this year 15 teenagers went there from Volgograd, and seven from Great Novgorod. And this happens every year.

Besides, we have a special program called "The City of the Future: Find Your Role", and within that program we bring a good team of professional trainers. We try to diversify our program continuously. I think that next year our project will have a new slant. This year we were working under the slogan: "Realize Your Dream". That is, previously we had a more aggressive stance – "Ticket to the Road from Captivity" – but today we are moving towards creative development and play. Through creativity, through festivals – towards positive future.

On the other hand, we do not try to sell our ideas up front, we try not to alienate the youth. We never say "no" to them even in extreme situation, we try to see something valuable in everything and turn them to a positive direction. Even when we see something totally negative, we say: "Well, folks, this is negative, but let's try to find something positive in that". We manage to establish trusting relationships even with very radical groups. Of course, we do not compromise, we stick to our position – healthy life style, life without drugs... Nevertheless, we are open for any dialogue with anyone.