

Appendix 4.4

Vladimir Klyshnikov
Medezinskaya Gazeta
Khabarovsk
December 1, 2005

December 1st is the International AIDS Day

A SCHOOL FOR REAL VOLUNTEERS

It is working at the Sakhalin Regional AIDS Prevention and Combat Center, and it is the only one in the country

Since the first HIV infection cases were identified in the US in 1981, the AIDS epidemic turned into a particular kind of crisis that no country has been able to avoid. AIDS invaded Russia 18 years ago, and every year since then more and more people are consumed by this Moloch. International experts estimate that between 860 thousand and 1.4 million Russian residents can be infected, although official numbers supplied by the RF Ministry of Health and Social Development are much more modest: 305242 people living with HIV were registered as of January 17, 2005.

Yes, Russia, as the rest of the countries, failed to reverse the situation with the global infection spread, and the pandemic continues its "parade" across the country. Nevertheless, many things were done in the past years that instill hope. Comprehensive prevention programs are implemented virtually in every region, and specialized medical care is improving.

Every year the number of governmental and nongovernmental anti-AIDS structures is growing. Sometimes they join together under the same roof to combine and strengthen their efforts. There is one good example of it in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, where a school for volunteers was opened in 2003 at the Regional AIDS and Infectious Diseases Prevention and Combat Center. It is the first and the only one of its kind in the country yet.

What kind of school is it, who is studying there, and especially, why? About six years ago several students from the local medical college learned several slogans promoting safe sex and went chanting them to the city disco clubs. They became the core of a youth NGO created later which has established contacts with the specialists from the local anti-AIDS center. There is no college or vocational school today, and perhaps not even a single governmental office, which has not been visited by volunteers with their actions, lectures, or just offers to become... volunteers.

- This year our kids have managed to drag to a seminar in our center even anti-narcotics specialists! – says proudly a therapist Tatyana Stepanenko, the volunteers' "custodian" and Head of the Office for consulting and medical prevention.

The most surprising thing is that 3 to 5 day long seminars for training volunteers who expressed their desire to disseminate basics of HIV/AIDS prevention among students and workers, are being held for two years with amazing regularity, without any "time-outs." Jointly with doctors – specialists in infectious diseases, skin diseases, narcology and others – volunteers are acquainting participants with educational programs and explaining risks of HIV and STD transmission.

The school backbone mainly consists of the Sakhalin State University students, and it is headed by a talented educationalist and psychologist Yelena Plotnikova. Being real volunteers, kids are working there diligently not for money but for a cause. As for maintaining the school itself, it does not cost much. "Maintenance" costs mainly include providing tea on Fridays. This is the day when volunteers have mandatory gatherings at the conference hall of the anti-AIDS center and ardently discuss their activities.

At the beginning the volunteer initiatives were supported by grants. And since recently the school is assisted by the international company "Sakhalin Energy" – the largest oil developer and operator of shelf zone projects in the Far East. It seems that just yesterday the company management presented the kids with a symbolic check for a "round" sum. And they have already signed a new one. Tomorrow, December 1st, on the International AIDS Day, the island volunteers are to receive another transfer of "tea" money - \$10,000.00.

Vladimir KLYSHNIKOV,

The MG Correspondent

PHOTO: this money check is not the last one.

Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk.

How do governmental structures and NGOs interact in other regions in the area of HIV/AIDS prevention? Read our story from the Primorye Region on page_____.