



## **To Russia With Love – Sasha’s Story**

After Sasha was born, his mother went through post-natal depression. This resulted in her being put into a psychiatric institution and at aged three, Sasha was taken into care in an orphanage for very young children. He was sent to Hortolova orphanage in 1997 at age 9. Here he was considered to be a ‘slow-learner’ but there was one To Russia With Love staff member who could see Sasha’s potential. Insisting on helping him, Sasha was given extra tuition under our Challenger Program and along with his own hard work, he was awarded a scholarship to the Lyceum, a school for academically gifted children where he continued to receive support from To Russia With Love.

At age 18 years, by which time he hadn’t seen his mother for 15 years, Sasha felt that it was important for him to meet her and so, with the help of To Russia With Love and an Irish volunteer who was very close to Sasha, the search began to find his mother. She was located in a psychiatric hospital in a village approximately 4 hours away from Bryansk. A meeting was set up and Sasha went to meet his mother.

When he got there, his mother didn’t recognise him, in her head Sasha was still only 3 years old. She was very small and frail looking and Sasha just picked her up in his arms and hugged her for as long as he could. They sat together and chatted for a while, Sasha filling her in on the past 15 years, his mum listening, looking at her son the way any proud parent looks at their child. When they said their goodbyes, Sasha assured his mother that he would be back to visit her. Last year, being true to his word, Sasha went to visit his mother, again with the same volunteer who is his dear friend. This time, his mum did recognise him. They held each other for quite some time and then sat together, holding each other’s hands, catching up and were completely oblivious to anything else that was going on in the room. On leaving, Sasha made the promise to stay in touch with his Mother.

Sasha is now in college studying IT and English having been accepted into the University of Bryansk and the University of Moscow, both prestigious academic schools. This achievement is quite unique for any child who has grown up in the care system. To Russia With Love have also arranged for Sasha to have a sponsor (a Dublin Business Man) who covers the costs of his fees, books and

clothing. Sasha is an avid football supporter and also plays on the Final Steps football team (whose kit is sponsored by a Dublin based Company) where they are top of the league.