



## **Help a Russian Orphan find their Mother this Christmas**

### ***1,500 Christmas gifts needed for To Russia with Love's orphans***

The number one Christmas wish in the orphanages helped by Irish charity To Russia with Love in Hortolova, Western Russia, is 'help me find my mother', just one of the gifts available as part of the charity's new 'Christmas Gifts with Love' campaign. The charity is urging Irish people to make this Christmas wish come true and help give the 1,500 presents needed to ensure each orphan in their care receives a gift this Christmas.

Many children living in Russian orphanages are 'social orphans' who have been separated from their parents by poverty, crime, addiction or neglect. After adopting a Russian orphan, Zina, now 20 years old, Clontarf housewife Debbie Deegan set up To Russia with Love in 1998 to help the thousands of neglected, under-nourished and un-loved Russian orphans

"We hope Irish people will consider these orphans when buying gifts this Christmas", says Debbie Deegan, To Russia with Love founder. "Many of the children we look after have been neglected and abandoned by their families for a variety of reasons and the biggest Christmas wish I hear again and again is help me find my mother. It's heart-breaking and I hope people will support our new campaign to make our Russian orphan's Christmas dreams come true."

Mindful of the credit crunch, a variety of gifts are available to suit all pockets from €10, which will give a Russian orphan a teddy bear to cuddle at night, €20 will provide a new hat, scarf and gloves to help young Russians brave the harsh winter weather of -25°C, while €100 will give Russian orphans toys to play with. €500 will give the ultimate Christmas gift of helping To Russia with Love with the travel, research and legal fee's required to unite a Russian child with his or her mother.

Upon leaving orphanages in Russia, orphans are typically left to fend for themselves and are vulnerable to trafficking, prostitution, drugs and crime. In response, To Russia with Love has introduced its 'Final Steps' programme supporting those who leave the orphanages into third level education. Only 4% of children leaving state care in Russia go on to further study. In contrast, To Russia with Love's 'Final Steps' programme has a 100% success rate with those on the programme studying business, medicine and law. €1,000 will give the gift of computers and printers to help Russian orphans progress their education.

Having grown from strength to strength over the past 10 years, To Russia with Love has helped over 5,000 orphans with huge support from patrons including Marian Keyes and Eddie Hobbs.

**To Russia with Love is urging Irish people to give much-needed gifts to Russian orphans this Christmas. Gift givers and donators can choose from a list of gifts at [www.torussiawithlove.ie](http://www.torussiawithlove.ie).**

**ENDS**

**Editorial Note:**

**Case study:** Misha Serdyukov (20) was taken to a baby orphanage at 2 years of age when his Mother was hospitalised in a Psychiatric Institution for Post Natal Depression. He moved to Hortolova Orphanage at the age of 7 where he met Debbie Deegan, founder of To Russia with Love. Misha had been mis-diagnosed as a slow learner until one of the To Russia with Love teachers spotted his potential and he was reassessed. With extra grinds and teaching Misha entered the Lyceum for academically gifted children and now studies IT in Bryansk University (very prestigious course and school) with support from the charity's 'Final Steps' programme.

Two years ago, having not seen his Mother for 16 years, he asked To Russia With Love to help him find her, which they did. She was still in the Psychiatric Hospital, a 4 hour drive away. One of the Irish volunteers accompanied him on this emotional trip. At first his Mother didn't know him as she still believed 'her Misha' to be a two year old boy, but when he picked her up and put his arms around her she started to cry!