

LATEST NEWS FROM THE LIVSLUST-DZIVESPRIEKŠ VOCATIONAL SCHOOL FOR ORPHANED AND OTHER VULNERABLE TEENAGERS IN LATVIA

At Livslust Evita found that there is a future for her as well

Evita Bogdanova was born in the village Vane, which is situated 1 km from the school of Livslust-Dzivespriekš. It is not hard to understand what she had to endure as a young girl. She was placed in a foster family next door to her real mother and foster siblings, who all refused to have any contact with her. What a tragedy to have your mother that close and to be rejected every day like a stranger. Evita knows nothing about her father. To make it even worse she was ill-treated by her foster parents who did not care for her and who exposed her to both physical and psychological violence.



Evita with the kitchen teacher Tereza Ozola, who probably is the person that has meant the most for her at the school.

Later she was placed at the Dzirciems orphanage and school. It is a comparatively good institution, that has co-operated with Livslust for a long time and that has sent several pupils to us. When Evita came she was severely marked by never having experienced the love and care of a family. For the first time in her life she met grown-ups who cared about her and whom she dared to trust. With the care and support of the school staff of Livslust she began her journey towards raised self-esteem. She put a lot of time and effort on both her personal development and the education to become a kitchen assistant. In June 2009 she finished with high grades. She now attends further education at Zalienieku vocational school with financial support from the Oriflame scholarship fund and she is doing really well. She is active within sports and drama and she is on the

pupils' council. Evita's story shows that there is hope even when everything looks dark. We are happy to see our pupils leave school with a newfound belief in a future that they did not dare to hope for.

Mentor Foundation and Livslust co-operate in Latvia

On March 18, SEB, Mentor and Livslust held a conference at the Stockholm School of Economics in Riga. It was the launching of the activities of Mentor Foundation in Latvia. The main purpose of Mentor is to help young people to settle in society and to develop strength to withstand drugs and violence. Moderator of the conference was Daina Jankalne, who is well-known from Latvian TV. One of the speakers was Laila Rieksta Riekstina, who is Head of the State Inspectorate for protection of Childrens' Rights. (Read about Mentor at www.mentorfoundation.org)



Girls from Livslust sing at the conference in Riga.

Former Livslust pupils are the first young people in Latvia to have a mentor. The mentors are volunteers from the staff of SEB and Volvo in Riga. The youngsters who have chosen to join the project, are now establishing themselves in society. Some of them work, some have trainee jobs and others continue to study. They have no parents to turn to for advice and support, so it will be of great importance for them to have contact with another grown up person. The co-ordinator of Mentor Latvia is Baiba Rulle. Her task is to bring together mentors and mentees, educate mentors and organize joint events.





The conference was featured several times by Latvian TV. Here Baiba Rulle is interviewed.

Unique contact with former pupils

Our ambition is to keep in touch with all our former pupils for at least five years after they have left. As far as we know, this is unique for our school. Sometimes it can be difficult to reach everybody as they move around or go abroad to find jobs. Some of them may not be interested in keeping up the contact, which we have to respect. We have good contact with the majority, however. We know their living-conditions and how they manage on their own. If they need special help and support we do what we can. Most of them are doing quite well, but some have problems. Two boys are in prison. Our social pedagogues visit them to make sure that they have clothes and other things they need. The aim is also for the boys to know that they can turn to the school when they are released. They will get help to straighten out their lives. Several others have got children and they might find it difficult to manage during these hard times. They receive food and clothes and we help them in their contacts with the social services. On the Latvian website of Dzivesprieks there is a forum for former pupils where they are encouraged to contact the school if they need help. Here they can also find job vacancies and information about events at the school to which they are welcome.



April 30th was the day of the spring cleaning. It is made into a funny event where pupils and staff get help from sponsors. In the picture we can see a couple of employees from SEB in Tukums, who worked in the garden with great joy. In the evening there was the traditional feast.

Dentist-bus at the school in Aizupe

Generally, the youngsters have not had much dental care before they arrive. Their teeth are often in a bad state. Dental care is free under the age of 18, but many of our pupils are older. Thanks to financial support from the Order of St. John of Sweden we are able to provide examination and emergency care. Last autumn,

however, we discovered that there was a need for extra measures, as the tooth status of many of the new pupils was really bad. As we had no costs budgeted for this unexpected expense we had no resources. Then Latvia stepped in and arranged dental care for everybody. They arranged for one of the new well equipped dentist buses to come to the school to examine all the pupils. Some of them had cavities in all their teeth and they later had them fixed in Kuldiga. Now it is up to everyone to look after their own teeth and for that purpose Colgate has donated a lot of products.



In a successful co-operation with Latvian companies, Livslust-Dzivesprieks offers education programmes within painting/repair work, kitchen work, sewing and joinery. The companies provide practice work, often with employment as a result.

Pupils learn responsibility in the House Council

The House Council is managed by social pedagogue Gita Priede-Pileniece. The council consists of elected representatives of the pupils. They meet once a week to discuss what happened the week before and to plan the coming week. It might be different events like a friendship evening with another school or youth organization, excursions or some celebration. They also talk about different problems that have occurred and how to solve them.

Many guests at the Open Door-day

During our years in Latvia, we have experienced difficulties in reaching out with information. In spite of repeated newspaper articles, TV- and radio-programs, letters and visits to authorities and institutions, the response has been unexpectedly weak. Our Latvian friends have explained that information has been looked upon as propaganda after the long time under Soviet regime. However, the new generations who have not experienced the Soviet repression, send out a signal of change. It is easier to gain a hearing. It was noticeable by the fact that more people than before came to the Open Door-day on April 21. More than 40 interested teenagers, mainly from Tukums, Saldus, Talsi and Madona, came to see what Livslust offers. Over 30 social pedagogues, psychologists, foster families and teachers also turned up. Some of them came together with young ones, others came out of curiosity to find out how we work. We take it as a clear signal that the information reaches its goal. We will be able to accept 15-20 new pupils in September so unfortunately there will not be room for all who apply.

Sports is of great importance

Sports have been on the agenda from the very start. To begin with we had an uneven lawn and the yard between the houses for sports activities. In the winter we used to borrow a worn gymnasium at the village school and sometimes an in-doors pool. Thanks to a donation from Johan Holmsäter we could build an asphalted surface for basket-ball and tennis in the summer and ice-hockey and skating in the winter. The roads in the neighborhood are well suited for jogging, cycling and walking. In the summertime canoeing with camping is a popular activity. Now and then we invite other schools and orphanages to different competitions.

During March, the Dzivesprieks basket-team took part in a tournament in Pure. Seven teams competed and our team came last. Now they are looking forward to have their revenge next year.



The Dzivesprieks bicycle team flanking a proud Edijs Petersons.

Thanks to a private donation, there will be more sports. It will be a subject on the school curriculum starting in September. The expansion was marked by the purchase of six racing bikes in April. Five boys and the sports teacher then participated in two 42 km cycle races in Sigulda and Cesis. So far, only boys cycle and play basket. The girls rather chose swimming, gymnastics and jogging.



Edijs succeeded to inspire the chairman of Livslust Sweden Martin Moström (to the right), to go to Riga to run the Marathon. Martin told us afterwards about the fantastic atmosphere and about how impressed he was by the joy and eagerness that was shown by both pupils and staff member.

On May 23 it was time for the Nordea Marathon in Riga. Edijs Petersons, the chairman of Dzivesprieks, is a keen marathon runner, who inspires pupils as well as staff members to run. Forty of our pupils, almost all, and ten staff members ran different distances. It means a lot for the youngsters that the grown-ups actually

take action instead of just talk. As the participants from Livslust-Dzivesprieks were invited by Nordea they had access to the VIP area which of course brought extra excitement.

Exchange between the Vackstanäs school and Livslust-Dzivesprieks

"Vackstanäs senior high school in Södertälje, Sweden, has had its first exchange students from Livslust-Dzivesprieks. During two weeks we have had the possibility to get to know Zane and Monta, two happy, positive and curious girls. They came from Latvia together with our pupils My and Amanda, who had spent a couple of weeks at Livslust. It turned out to be two intensive and exciting weeks also including a happy re-union with our pupil Minna, who was exchange student at Livslust last autumn.

If you only play in your own back-yard it is difficult to understand what happens in other parts of the world. This exchange between our schools offers a unique opportunity for young people from Sweden and Latvia to have a first-hand experience of the culture and everyday-life of each other. If you get a chance to experience a school in another part of the world you will have a new wider perspective on the personal plane for other cultures and society conditions. We will be able to add new ideas to our own activities by comparing education, exchange of pedagogical ideas and taking part in another school- and cultural life. The education streams of Vackstanäs - Textile form and design, Sports, Health, Nutrition and being a boarding school - opens up for a natural interest between our two particular schools. The pupils and the teachers easily find points of contact within their subjects and learn from each other, more than just on the cultural plane.



Zane and Monta, to the left, during the celebration of the Eve of May Day at Vackstanäs.

For these first exchanges, the teachers of Vackstanäs in co-operation with the teachers of Livslust-Dzivesprieks have planned most of the project and the pupils have had little influence. The thought is that the pupils will take more and more part in the planning process, something that we believe will strengthen the experience even more. In addition we collect our experience year by year for evaluation and documentation in the form of Diaries and Project Reports. Hopefully this exchange will continue and generate many rings on the water."

Thérèse Karner, Assistant Headmaster, Vackstanäs

The economic situation in Latvia

For the time being, the people of Latvia must endure the serious policy of austerity in the form of considerable wage cuts and tax increases in order for the economy to recover. The situation on the labor market still looks dark with an unemployment rate that has risen to 21,7%. It is difficult for young people to find a job and many children and teenagers are left alone to care for themselves by parents who go abroad to work. GNP per capita in Latvia is SEK 106 314 (EURO 11 171) and is expected to decrease by 2,5% this year. To be compared with Sweden SEK 277 478 (EURO 29 156) with an expected raise of 2,1%. The turning point to the better is expected to happen during 2011. (Sources: The Embassy of Sweden in Riga, Swedbank.)



Knut Knutsson from the TV program The Antique Road Show gave a special show for Livslust at his Auction Chambre in Uppsala. The evening was really nice with many guests who had brought objects to be valued. Here we see Mr. Knutsson talking with Sigrid De Geer, who works as a volunteer for Livslust.

Some activities during the last 6 months:

- The Valentine Day was celebrated during 2 days with new elements. The day before, the boys surprised the girls by decorating the dinner table and waiting on them during dinner. On the next morning the boys were served breakfast in bed by the girls. When they got up they were met by a beautifully decorated corridor, which the girls

had worked hard with during the night. Everybody had a wonderful day filled with happy giggling and laughs.

- The organization Youth Against AIDS continues to visit the school on a regular basis to discuss and teach about this serious subject.
- Be Free, an organization against drug abuse, paid a visit to the school.
- There have been five movie nights.
- Children from the orphanage Dzirciems has given a concert in Aizupe and the pupils of Livslust took part in the music competition Pop Street at Dzirciems.
- The pupils were in Riga and saw the play "Zurka Kornelia".
- As a part of the subject life-skills the pupils visited SEB in Riga to learn how a bank operates.
- The insurance company If came to the school to talk about insurance.
- In connection with Easter there was a competition about Easter knowledge.
- Staff members attended a seminar about "Integration of youngsters with special needs into education activities" and they were at the exhibition "School and Books".
- The co-operation with external psychologists continues. They come regularly and talk with the children.
- All the pupils take part in a "genogram" therapy where they draw their family tree in order to find out who they are.
- On May 27 the restaurant Vairak Saules and Dzivesprieks arranged their first charity dinner. 60 paying guests came to enjoy a very nice evening with a lot of fantastic food.
- As a wedding-gift the Crown Princess Victoria of Sweden and her fiancé Daniel received aprons made at the workshop of Livslust. Their names were beautifully embroidered on the aprons.

Thank you for all support from faithful volunteers, co-operation partners and sponsors and thank you to all companies and private persons for your donations of money, goods and collected clothes.

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Help us to support vulnerable teenagers

Companies could commit themselves on a long-term basis as a **CO-OPERATION PARTNER**. You can become a **LIVSLUST-SPONSOR** with a monthly contribution of your own choice or you can make a **SINGLE DONATION** in connection with Christmas or other occasions. You could also **HOST** a couple of our students in the summer. You could **BUY PRODUCTS** made in our workshops. For additional information please use the contact details.