

## Novi Dom Opening

20 June 2006

### Novi Dom officially opens its doors

The official opening of Novi Dom was held on Monday 19 June in Minsk with representatives from Norwood, World Jewish Relief (WJR), Jewish Child's Day, Voluntas, Chabad Children of Chernobyl and the Belarussian Ministry for Education in attendance. The new service, pioneered by Norwood and WJR is the first ever respite care facility and educational resource in Minsk for children over the age of eleven with learning disabilities.

In Belarus, there has previously been no respite care or secondary education provided for families with disabled children over the age of eleven. This puts a massive strain on the family, as parents face the stark choice of leaving the labour market to care for their older children at home and plunge into absolute poverty, or the awful alternative of putting them into a state-run orphanage because they are unable to cope. Novi Dom is therefore a life-changing asset to the individual children, families and the entire community. Norwood and WJR will run the respite care facility, whilst the Belarussian Government will be responsible for educating the children.



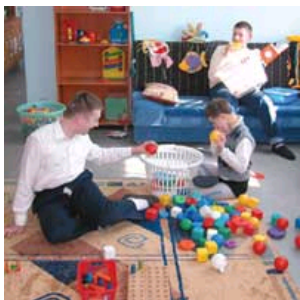
NORWOOD  
CHILDREN & FAMILIES FIRST

VOLUNTAS

WORLD  
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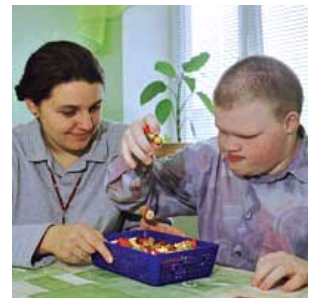
Norwood – who are experts in the field of services for disabled children - together with WJR - who are renowned for providing humanitarian aid to disadvantaged people in Eastern Europe - were natural partners for this special project, which will help both Jewish and non-Jewish children with disabilities in the region. Norwood has been involved in the area since 1998, when it was approached by a UNICEF-funded organisation to help improve the quality of life for 25,000 orphans in Belarus, and WJR has worked in the former Soviet Union since 1990.

The inspiration for the project came from a young Jewish girl Lera Abeleva, aged 14, who had severe cerebral palsy and associated disabilities. Norma Brier (Norwood Chief Executive) first met Lera in 1999 whilst she was in Belarus, following a request from Chabad Children of Chernobyl that she visit her in a state-run orphanage. It was as a result of this meeting that Norma recognised the need for a respite care facility in the region - and the Novi Dom project was born.

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Having established a special bond with Lera, Norma and Vivienne Lewis (Chief Executive of WJR) decided to build a residential area for her at Novi Dom and she was due to be one of the first children to benefit from its services. Lera had suffered much ill health over the past few years but owing to the wonderful and dedicated carers that were employed with the help of Jewish Child's Day, Lera's quality of life was improved considerably. However, towards the end of December 2005, Lera's condition deteriorated significantly and she very sadly passed away just days before the facility opened. In fact, her funeral took place on the day that Novi Dom welcomed its first children.



Speaking at the official opening of Novi Dom, **Norma Brier, Chief Executive of Norwood said:** "We are delighted that Novi Dom is now open. Through this wonderful facility, we will be able to help approximately eighty families to keep their disabled children at home with them with the knowledge that for the first time ever, respite support is available. Children at Novi Dom will be looked after in a stimulating environment in which they can maximise their learning and enjoy having fun through play. They will be looked after in a caring and stimulating Jewish environment, but the facility will be open to children of all faiths. We hope that the service will be a model of child-centred care for children with learning disabilities in the region."



**Vivienne Lewis, Chief Executive of WJR, said:** "Novi Dom is a unique resource which will have a profound effect on the quality of life, not just for the children, but for their entire families. We will continue to work with Voluntas (an NGO in Belarus), the Belarussian Government and their childcare professionals to give them the expertise necessary so that they will be able to draw on their own resources using this pioneering project as a model to develop their own services in the future."

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