

Tanya's Dream

Family Group Children's Home Khabarovsk, Russia

Tanya was born in a northern city in Russia about thirty years ago. She was born severely disabled with thalidomide type deformities to her arms - tiny hands emerging almost from her shoulders and legs that were also seriously affected. Her mother took one look at her and decided that she didn't want such a child - so she walked out of the hospital, abandoning her tiny infant for the authorities to take care of. Tanya grew up in an orphanage for abandoned babies with severe physical deformities and was never given any schooling, although intellectually she is normal.

After her time in the orphanage she went to the old people's home at age 18 - there are no other types of care provided for disabled people in the government system. Her future looked very bleak - a lifetime spent in an old people's home with no one to love or care for her.

However, Tanya was blessed by God because some people from a local church visited the home where she was living and they took her with them to church. She became a Christian and was baptised. As she had taught herself to read and write despite having no education at all, Tanya decided to go with them to a church evening Bible School and learn as much as she could. This she successfully completed, passing all the examinations and finishing her year of study with a certificate.

Tanya wanted to serve the Lord, but wondered what she could do. I met her when I was teaching a course on children's ministry at this bible

school and was impressed at how she overcame her physical difficulties to clamber up the staircase to the upper room where the bible school was held. She asked me if there was any way she could serve the Lord and I suggested working in the Sunday School. "But won't they laugh at me?" she asked. We discussed this problem and I suggested that even if they did stare at first or laugh, they would soon become accustomed to her and this would cease when they knew the person instead of just looking at the outward appearance. This she eventually did and helped in the Sunday School for a number of years.

Meanwhile, she had begun to live with the family who took her to church - they were sorry for her being forced to live among elderly people in a home and never having a normal family life. So Tanya became a considerable help to the family and assisted Leonid and Olga with the housework and upbringing of their twins and also with care for Dima, their 18-year-old mentally challenged son. When they moved to our city to help with the work of ARK, Tanya came with them and was a help and a blessing, continuing to work in the local Sunday School. She also began to teach children from the local school how to use papers from lollies to make wonderful and intricate crafts. The children came after school to the house where Tanya was living and worked with her there.

Sadly, during the winter a real problem appeared. In the apartment where they were living, there was no inside toilet - everyone had to go outside to

the toilet at the end of the yard. With Tanya's disabilities, she was often sick or fell in the ice and snow as a result of having to go outside all the time. The family told me that they feared having to send Tanya back to the town she came from and back to the elderly people's home because of this problem. Also, there was really no longer space in their tiny apartment for Tanya as well as their own three growing children.

Tanya came to me and asked if I could help her buy the apartment next door so that she would have a place of her own and need never fear being sent back to the old people's home. The apartment would cost USD\$4,000 (AUD\$8,000). It joined the existing apartment and it had an indoor toilet. Tanya planned to make a doorway between the two apartments and she would live in her half but the family would be next door and could help her when necessary. In addition, Leonid and Olga had long held a dream to have a 'family group children's home' - a place where they could take in a few children from an orphanage and make them part of the family. If the two apartments were joined, Tanya planned to make this a reality. She, Leonid and Olga would together take care of the children, giving them a real Christian family instead of growing up in an orphanage where no-one really cared about the children.

I'm thrilled to report that, as at May 2006, the home is successfully caring for twelve (12) orphans.

by Robin Byrnes

Give and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure - pressed down, shaken together and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.