

## **Russia experts thank The Haven Wolverhampton for support in addressing domestic violence in Russia**

The Crisis Centre for Women and Children “Ekaterina”, Russia thanked staff of The Haven Wolverhampton for their continuing support during the 10 years of partnership work since the set up of the centre in 1998. The certificate was presented to The Haven staff, Kath Rees and Elvira Wilson during the ceremony in Ekaterinburg, held to mark the achievements of the three year project (2006-2009) “Life Without Fear” funded by The Big Lottery Fund.

‘Life without Fear’ initiative included specialist domestic violence training for judges, lawyers, police and women’s organisations in Russia, focusing on supporting women through processing domestic violence cases through the criminal justice system. During the three years of the project, 220 Justices of Peace, 123 lawyers, and 270 crisis centre staff and 82 police officers were trained. In total, 695 professionals have benefited from The Haven’s expertise.

Russian judges and lawyers have never been trained on domestic violence before. Many of them lacked basic understanding of problem and were subject to common myths eg “it is her own fault” and “if it is so bad, why does not she leaves?” etc. The programme helped to raise DV awareness but also led to many positive changes on how cases of DV are dealt with. Statistics collected as part of the project from Sverdlovsk Court and Police showed steady decrease of cases closed and increase of number of perpetrators brought to justice. Statistics also demonstrates that less murders are committed on domestic grounds in the area.

A multi-agency conference organised at the end of the project (March 2009) demonstrated willingness of the key agencies to view domestic violence as a serious crime and put it on the Government agenda in the region.

The Crisis Center “Ekaterina” is now viewed as one the most advanced centres in developing strategies to tackle domestic violence in Russia. The director of the centre Ludmila Ermakova and the Chief Executive of The Haven, Kath Rees, were invited to share their experience at the national seminar “Prevention of Domestic Violence” organised by the Consortium of Women’s Non-Governmental Organisations in April 2009, in Moscow, Russia. The seminar was attended by representatives from Russian Police, Institute of Civil Society, the crisis centre’s representatives and Human Rights representatives from the different areas of Russia.

Each year, about 14,000 women die at the hands of their husbands or intimate partners in the Russian Federation. This number is roughly equal to the number of all soldiers who died in the 10-year war of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Russian women are five times more likely to be killed by their partners than women from Western European countries (UNICEF, 2000). At the same time many women in Russia do not believe that law enforcement agencies can help. One of the clients of the Crisis Centre “Ekaterina” informed us that when she called to Police several times she was told that they would open a case only if she is killed.

The project started to shift the attitude toward domestic violence in Sverdlovsk Area, Russia. There are now seven shelters in Ural Siberian regional and just over twenty

across the whole Russia. Far not enough yet and there is much more work to be done. We at The Haven are proud to be able to share our experience and our knowledge with The Crisis centre “Ekaterina” and other women’s organisations abroad to enable them to provide more effective support for women and children victims of domestic violence.

*Elvira Wilson*  
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Training for the Coalition of the Crisis Centres of the Ural-Siberian Region, Russia



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