

Organisation: Catholic Charity Budweis (České Budějovice)

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The citizens of the Czech Republic could only begin helping the victims of Chernobyl after the fall of the Iron curtain.

Among the first initiatives which took place afterwards was the return of the Volhynian Czechs home.⁽¹⁾ It was a large scale operation, coordinated by the activists from Volhynia as well as by the governments of both states. Between 1991 and 1992 about 2000 people could move to the Czech part of Czechoslovakia. Before that most of those people lived in the areas which were affected by the Chernobyl accident. In the meantime, their children could spend holidays in Czechoslovakian summer camps. When the families arrived to their new home, they were helped when they were looking for a flat and for a job.

But the help that the Czechoslovaks (and after 1993 Czechs) have been offering the victims is not limited only to the case I already mentioned. There are some initiatives, led by diverse nongovernmental organizations, whose aim is to help the most affected countries: Belarus and Ukraine.

When I was reading the weekly published magazine „Rozhlas“, I came upon an article describing a moving story of a Czech family, which provides support (moral and financial) to a Belarusian girl, who comes from a socially disadvantaged family and suffers from thyroid illness⁽²⁾. She is one of 125 children who are supported within the frame of the „Adopce na dálku“ initiative [Long distance adoption], which is since 2005 organized by the Caritas České Budějovice [Catholic Charity Budweis], which is a branch of the Caritas ČR, humanitarian organization active in the whole country. I decided to find out more about this organization.

The aim of the organization is to help people all around the world. Their goal is to support the children in developing countries as well as the socially disadvantaged children. Caritas helps them financially, because it covers costs of the education, which should give the children the possibility to improve their living conditions. In the Long distance adoption system, the „adoptive parents“ choose a child in a specific land (some European, African and Asian countries available). Then they pay the costs of studies and for extracurricular activities, which amounts yearly to about 5 - 6 thousand Czech crowns [ca 250€]. They also keep in touch with the child and support it morally.

In Europe, the organization helps children from Latvia and from Belarus. In the latter country, the children are chosen according to their needs, especially from incomplete families, in hard living conditions. Caritas also organizes since 2007 summer camps in the Czech Republic, during which 15 children spend a week in the country, see some sights and above all, also see their „adoptive parents“. Some „adoptive parents“ also visit their child from time to time in Belarus.

But the help is not limited only to the children. Caritas runs multiple projects in Belarus, including a hospital and accommodation for the people in need.

1 I've already mentioned this initiative in the interview, which had been conducted with Mr. Iljuk, who played an important role in the organizing of the transfer. The interview contains also a more detailed description of the fate of Volhynian Czechs.

2 Týdeník rozhlas 2010/38; translated article attached below

The two examples described in the lines above show clearly that human help is not limited by borders.

„Daughter from Belarus“

Mr. and Mrs. Vlček first met Viktoria, 14 year old schoolgirl from Belarusian Pinsk, about three years ago thanks to the Long distance adoption programme. They don't have their own children, and this was, they say, one of the reasons, why they actually became interested in the adoption programme.

„We wanted our child to be from a country, which is not far away, and which [it's proximity] would allow us more than a formal contact“ says 48 old Pavel Vlček. His wife Jana adds: „We have been for a couple of years engaged in the fight against the nuclear energy and the part of Belarus, neighbouring with Ukraine, was one of the most affected places. We wanted therefore to help directly somebody, who'd been affected by the explosion.“

Young Viktoria is at first sight not different from Czech girls of her age. But the Vlček spouses got to know her better and they know she is different. Sort of more mature. „Viktoria's parents became addicted to alcohol, they no longer managed to bring up their children, and the state therefore abridged them of the right to raise them. Their grandmother began to take care of two girls and one boy then“ tells Mrs. Vlčková. Viktoria is the eldest of the children, and so she has also partly to take care of her siblings. She is also handicapped. Similar as many other people in Ukraine and Belarus, she suffers from thyroid illness. As Pavel Vlček reminds us, this is a consequence of the Chernobyl tragedy.

Thousands of Czechs have already been participating at the Long distance adoption project, which is organized by the Caritas ČR and its local branches. Most of the parents, however, never had the chance to meet their „adoptive“ children. They send money regularly, school proprieties and clothes too. And also letters. Mr. and Mrs. Vlček meet „their“ Viktoria every year. They either invite her to their place in Southern Bohemia, or they launch for Belarus themselves. They also send the financial support amounting 250 € per annum and birthday and name-day presents.

You will discover more in the documentary „Everyday Heroes“...

„Dcera“ z Běloruska

S Viktorou, čtrnáctiletou školačkou z běloruského Pinsku, se manželé Vlčkoví seznámili díky projektu Adopce na dálku zhruba před třemi lety. Vlastní děti nemají, a to byl, jak sami říkají, jeden z důvodů, proč se o Adopci na dálku začali vůbec zajímat. „Chtěli jsme, aby naše adoptivní dítě pocházelo ze země, která není daleko, aby nešlo jenom o formální kontakt,“ říká osmačtyřicetiletý Pavel Vlček. A jeho žena Jana dodává: „Oba dva se už léta angažujeme v boji proti jaderné energetice a část Běloruska, která sousedí s Ukrajinou, patří k místům nejvíce postiženým černobylskou havárií. Chtěli jsme tedy zcela adresně pomoci někomu, na kom se výbuch Černobylu podepsal.“

Viktorka se na první pohled ničím neliší od stejně starých českých dívek. Manželé Vlčkoví ji ale poznali víc. A vědí, že je jiná. Tak nějak dospělejší než většina jejích českých vrstevnic. „Viktorčini rodiče propadli al-



Čtrnáctiletá Viktoria Alexandrovna Zelman z Běloruska našla nové „rodiče“ až v Česku
Foto Jana Vlčková

koholu, výchovu svých dětí nezvládali, a tak je stát zbavil rodičovských práv. O dvě malé holčičky a jednoho chlapce se tedy začala starat jejich babička,“ vypráví Jana Vlčková. Viktorka je z dětí nejstarší, takže péče o domácnost i o mladší sourozence stojí částečně i na ní. Navíc si s sebou do života nese zdravotní hendikep. Jako spousta lidí na Ukrajině a v Bělorusku má nemocnou štítnou žlázu. Což je, jak připomíná Pavel Vlček, jasný následek černobylské havárie.

Do projektu Adopce na dálku, který u nás zaštiťuje Charita ČR a místní charity po celé zemi, se zapojily už tisíce Čechů. Většina z nich se však se svým „adoptivním“ dítětem nikdy nesetká. Posílají pravidelně peníze na školní pomůcky nebo oblečení. A také dopisy. Manželé Vlčkoví „svoji“ Viktorou vídají pravidelně každý rok. Buď ji na týden pozvou k sobě domů do jižních Čech, nebo se vypraví přímo za ní do Běloruska. K tomu samozřejmě patří finanční výpomoc ve výši pět tisíc korun ročně a nějaké dárky k narozeninám či k svátku.

Více už si poslechněte v dokumentu nazvaném O hrdinech všedních dnů, který vysílá stanice Praha v rámci cyklu Dobrá vůle.

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