

Information about Tony Dumesnil Widmer and his work in developing social services in Russia and his contribution in strengthening friendship between people of Russia and UK.

The Board of the Russian Union of social workers and social pedagogues would like to present the work of Tony Widmer in Russia.

Tony Widmer was born 16th July 1943 Guildford, Surrey

Tony began working in the social sphere as a volunteer for the Blackfriars Settlement, London around 1969.

He qualified as a social worker in the England in 1974.

He began to work with Russia in 1992 when he was a manager of disability services in Norfolk. In 1993 having approached the late Lady Jill Braithwaite for support, the Russian European Trust for Welfare Reform, a British registered charity was established. David Wright, Director of Social Services, Norfolk was elected Chair and Jill Braithwaite, Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees. The Trust was formally launched in October 1994 by then Secretary of State for Health, Virginia Bottomley with the presence of the representatives of the Ministry of social protection of Russia.

Tony became a director of RET. The work of the Trust was very demanding and Tony took early retirement in Norfolk in 1996 to work full time helping to develop new profession and social services for vulnerable groups in Russia.

Social work training

Even before the Trust was set up Tony initiated the trip of teachers who were going to teach the new profession social work. Several groups of Russians went for the study visits to East Anglia, Enfield, London School of Economics and Sheffield schools of social work, looking at curricula, shadowing social work teachers, learning from the rich British experience of social work training. During these years up to 100 Russian social work teachers visited UK and approximately 50 UK teachers participated in joint programmes and trainings in Russia/

Today there are 130 schools of social work in Russia. Tony gives social work lectures in Moscow and other universities when he is in Russia

Social services for elderly people

Social work for elderly people did not exist in Russia at the beginning of 1990-s. Tony Widmer brought to Russia British expertise and through some projects started to introduce ideas of standards of social services for elderly people, new approaches of work of residential homes, day care centres, individual assessment of need,

reminiscence therapy, new rehabilitation technologies.

In 1997-2000 new ideas were implemented in Samara region. Tony was the Manager on the very large project “Development of social services for vulnerable groups” which was financed by the EU.

In 2000 The Russian European Trust were successful in winning the tender for a major 3 - year DFID Project, “The Development of Services for Older People in Kemerovo Oblast”. Tony was appointed Team Manager with overall responsibility for the project. The project became so successful that Kemerovo became a Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Development, experimental model for social work with elderly people for all of Russia.

2003 – 2004 Institutional Building Project on Social Policy for Older People. Tony was appointed project adviser on EU TACIS project with the Russian Ministry of Health and Social Development and the Northern Ireland Health and Social Services Board. The project focused on social policy development around the issues of caring for the elderly and the establishment of a co-ordination a group of people who act as advisors to the Ministry for the development of social policy.

2007-2008 Tony developed and managed the project “Supporting the Development of Social Services for Elderly and Disabled People in Rural Areas of Russia” with funding from the Medicor Foundation. The project aimed to improve social services delivery to the more isolated rural areas. It was estimated by the seven participating regions that some 20% of their elderly and disabled clients received improved services as a result of the project.

Samara is now the leading area in Russia in social services for elderly people, Kemerovo – is the very famous in Russia for its innovative ideas, Vladimir, Khanty-Mansiisk, Altai Republic, Moscow oblast are among leaders in this field. All these regions appreciated the professional contribution of Tony Widmer. Tony has awards from Governors of many of these Russian regions.

Disability programmes

Tony Widmer has contributed a lot in new approaches to social work with disabled people. In 1994-1995 he initiated a EU project to set up a Coalition of Blind, Deaf and Disabled people in Moscow oblast with funding from the EU. It was one of the first in Russia example of necessity for disabled people to act jointly, not separately, to bring about change in attitude towards disabled people.

In 1995 Tony used his personal initiative and organised a visit to the UK by 50 disabled CIS sportsmen to look at access to sport and leisure for people with disabilities. The visit was funded by the Gorbachev foundation.

In 2001 – 2004 Tony was the key long term expert of the project “Development of a New Approach to Disability and Social Integration” which was funded by DFID.

Russian European Trust was part of a consortium headed by NICARE. The project involved many regions of Russia and was very well received and implemented. It was a lot to do with the professionalism, social work skills and understanding of Russian realities of Tony Widmer.

With the participation of Tony over the years several Centres for Independent Living were set up in Samara, Penza, Kemerovo, Chuvashia, Rostov-on-Don/

Now Tony is working closely with the Moscow Government on introducing ideas of direct payments, care for carers scheme, information-resource centres, occupational therapy models, change of the care system for mentally ill people. He has organised several study visits to England to look at these services. All study visits for Moscow social services staff were organised by Tony on the voluntary basis.

Many of the ideas connected with the services for disabled people were brought to Russia by RET and Tony Widmer as its director. All centres and schemes still exist long after funding was over. Most of the schemes continue to have contacts with the Trust. Tony Widmer is still often asked to consult regions on different new ideas.

Ex-Servicemen

In very difficult years of 1992-1995 Tony has helped to retrain Russian ex-officers for new profession – social work. The idea was very original and unusual – to train ex-officers for social work profession. The 6 month course was set up for ex-officers and their wives. Nearly 100 of them has got new qualification and managed to find jobs. These people travelled to England to have study visits. Without money Tony managed to organise professional programmes for several groups with the home stay for ex-officers in the families of the English social workers.

This programme gave a birth to the idea to set up special social welfare centres for discharged military personnel and their families. It was idea of Tony Widmer. The RET managed to obtain funds for this idea and from 1995-1998 Tony was responsible for the development and implementation of a project “Development of Social Welfare Provision for Military Families in Tver Region”. This was funded through the EU TACIS Programme and the UK Ministry of Defence. The aim was to set up a centre to support serving and ex-servicemen and families.

The project was supported by the Russian Government. The Soldiers', Sailors', and Airmen's, Families Association and a number of UK universities participated in this highly successful project. From 1999 to 2001 Tony was able to secure further funding to develop centres in Tambov and Noginsk, Moscow Region and also to train social workers to provide help and support to the bereaved families of servicemen.

In 1997 he worked in a resettlement programme for ex-servicemen. This included a visit to NATO, Belgium and to SSAFA and the MOD resettlement programme in the

UK, when Tony accompanied a group of ex-servicemen and heads of social services headed by German Titov (2nd Man in Space), to discuss resettlement issues. The programme was funded by NATO.

The work in this field has never stopped. Tony often visits centres in Tambov, Tver and Noginsk, he has contacts with MoD of Russia. The Heads of the Tver and Noginsk centres were delegates of the Third congress of social workers of Russia and participated at the recent reception given by UK Ambassador at the Embassy.

Work in this direction has helped many ex-officers to find new career, new life and new hopes.

Work on disaster management and burnout

The tragedy with submarine Kursk brought the Trust to the idea of new direction – work with victims of disasters and their families. A group of Russian social workers and psychologists went for training to England with the support of SSAFA and the MoD . Tony was organizing study visits, meetings and consultations, conferences in England and in Russia on this topic. Several books on bereavement and grief were published and distributed.

After tragedy in Beslan, Tony went there not once to help with the training of social workers on how to prevent post trauma and burnout. The work was very well received by Government of the North Ossetia Republic.

Thanks to the support of the British Embassy Tony was able to take a small group of social services staff from Beslan to England in October 2005 for study visit to look how the UK responded to disasters such as the July 2005 London bombings.

In 2008 the Russian Union of Social Workers and Social Pedagogues, The Russian European Trust and European House, Denmark were successful in obtaining funds as part of the EU IBPP Programme for a project “Empowering women working as social workers in communities affected by disaster”. The project include Ossetia (Beslan), Moscow City (Nord Ost Theatre tragedy), and Kemerovo (mining disasters).

It was Tony’s initiative to develop the project. He was appointed as project advisor and the leading EU expert on the project and organized a very successful study visit to the UK. The project was completed at the end of March this year.

Tony received awards from Ossetia and Kemerovo for his work in disaster management sphere.

Russian President Dmitri Medvedev acknowledged the importance of supporting social workers as helping profession when he met delegates of the congress of social workers. It is a UK idea and a lot was contributed by RET and by its director.

Legislation

Tony has managed to establish good working relationship with the members of Russian Duma and members of British Parliament. With funding from the British Know How Fund Democracy Programme, several visits were organised from both sides to look at the legislation in social support of elderly, disabled and families and children at risk with the aim of strengthening the normative-legislative basis of the system of social services at all levels and achieving mutual understanding and coordination of actions of the organs of legislative and executive branches (Programme “Social reform and democratic support” 1999-2000).

Members of the House of Lords also visited Russia, Lord Laming, Lord Morris, Baroness Platt who helped to contribute to better understanding.

It was very important for Russia in the late 1990-s when we were making new laws in the new sphere.

Work in Kyrgyzstan

Tony worked in Kyrgyzstan from 1996 up to now. He helped to develop social services, to set up the first social work training course and the Association of Social Workers of Kyrgyzstan. All these years he tried to raise money to support vulnerable people of Kyrgyzstan in the most difficult years of poverty and unrest.

Tony supported residents of elderly homes in Chui and Jalal-Abad regions by raising money to buy cows and sheep as people there at that time have forgotten the taste of meat and milk. He managed to bring to UK the directors of residential homes of the country to introduce UK system of support of elderly people.

The RET applied for EU funds and UK Lottery, got money from both funding bodies and as a result 2 Centres were set up – one for disabled and one for elderly people. Tony was a team manager for both of those projects.

Association of social workers of Kyrgyzstan is a very strong NGO, it became member of International Federation of social workers and very actively involved with all activities of the Union of social workers and social pedagogues of Russia. Tony has visited Kyrgyzstan as a volunteer several times. The last time – in December 2009 to lecture at the School of social work in Bishkek and to discuss possibility for new projects in social sphere. he work of Tony was awarded by President of the country and by the Government.

Union of social workers and social pedagogues

In 2000 when the Union was in danger of folding, Tony was a great help in attracting the support and help of the British Association of Social Workers (BASW), who he was a member of. He also helped to obtain a grant from the British Embassy to launch our Magazine “Social Work” which is now widely distributed throughout Russia and self-financed. He was also successful in raising money for exchanges between the members of the boards of each organisation.

He is a very active elected member of the Board of the Union responsible for international contacts and gives his time freely to support its activities. He will be meeting with the Chief Executive of BASW in England in November to discuss ways of deepening our collaboration.

Tony has a unique position being member of two professional NGOs – British Association of social workers and Russian Union of social workers and social pedagogues. Each NGO benefits from his active participation and the ties between both NGOs are strong.

Awards

Tony received 2 State awards – one in 2003 from Russian Ministry of Labour and Social Development signed by Minister Mr Pochinok for active and fruitful work on implementation of social programmes and development of social services institutions in Russian Federation and another from President of Kyrgyzstan Mr Akaev in 2002 for activities in the field of social support of population in Kyrgyzstan.

He has also got awards from Governors, Deputy Governors, Heads of social services of several regions of Russia

We have no doubt that Tony and the Russian European Trust have had a large influence in the way that social services have developed in our country since 1992. More than 1000 people from Russia visited UK and up to 500 British specialists came to Russia – all these people were part of the RET activities.

Tony is a real patriot of his country proud of UK achievements in social sphere, he is also a very good friend of our country giving a lot of his passion and time to support the most disadvantaged people in Russia.

Tony first came to our country in August 1991 when the Soviet Union still existed. In September 1991 on the day of the collapse of the Soviet Union he met the delegation from Russia in Glasgow at the IFSW Conference. From there the contacts with Russia started.

In 2011 celebrated 20-year of successful work of Tony Widmer with his Russian counterparts and professional friends in developing social services in Russia and bringing the best experience of UK to us.

We would be very glad if his contribution in developing good relationships between UK and Russia social workers and support to vulnerable people will be noticed and publiced by mass media in UK.