

# Hosting Children from Belarus

## Why do children from Belarus need recuperative holidays?

The accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in 1986 has left large parts of Belarus contaminated. The children who live in these areas have to eat food containing radio-nuclides, and this is damaging their immune systems. A few weeks of fresh air and clean food can give a great boost to their health.

## What kind of children come to stay in Britain?



Most of the children we bring to Britain are in remission from cancer or leukaemia. Others may have diabetes or have recently had hospital treatment. Many have not yet suffered any serious illness but they live in the more contaminated parts of the country and are greatly in need of a healthy break to keep them free from illness in the future.



Each of our groups makes its own decisions about what kind of children they would like to invite and what age group. Some decide they would prefer children in the 8 -13 age range. Others agree to take teenagers, and this is important as older children get very few offers of a holiday abroad. For teenagers with cancer the holiday is an important psychological boost as well as the more obvious health benefits. We also bring young children, 3 – 8 years old, who have either had cancer or have diabetes or a disability. They are accompanied by their mothers, who are almost as much in need of a holiday as the children.

## How old are the children?

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## When do the children come to Britain?

They usually arrive in late July. The majority of families find it easier to host in the Summer holiday, and for the Belarusian children it is a good time to get away from home. Summers are hot, dry and dusty and this can



cause an increase in radiation levels.



## How long do they stay here?

Four weeks as this is the minimum period which doctors tell us can make a significant difference to the children's health. The children usually stay with one family for the first two weeks, and a second family for the final fortnight.

## Can we host just one child?

No, we do not generally allow this. Most of the children do not speak English and it is quite daunting to travel to a foreign country and stay with complete strangers. It is much easier for the children if they have a friend to chat to, especially at bed time, when they might otherwise

feel lonely. It is also part of our Child Protection Policy, as we believe the children are safer staying in pairs.

## How does the charity decide if we would be a suitable host family?

A couple of members of your local group will come to visit you at home. Probably the Co-ordinator and someone who has some experience in social work or child care. They will not come as inspectors, but just to see that your house feels like a safe and welcoming place for children to stay. You will be asked to complete an application form for the charity and a DBS form (this is required for anyone working with children, professionally or voluntarily). You will need to register with the DBS update service which will mean that you do not need to complete further forms in the future. Most convictions which are old or relate to very minor offences will not be shown on your DBS certificate. The charity is interested only in offences which might indicate a potential danger to the children. But we also have to satisfy UK Visas and Immigration at the Home Office, in order to receive a visa for the children to come to stay with you.



### Is it necessary for us to have children of our own?

No, in some cases the visiting children like to be in a house with no other children, so they can be the centre of attention. As long as you borrow some toys and games from friends and your house is child friendly, it need not be a problem at all. Grandparents who are still energetic make great host parents. If you do have children, it is important that they are enthusiastic about hosting children from Belarus, and happy to share their home and toys.



### What would our role as a host family be?

To make the children feel at home and to feed them as well as you can – plenty of fruit, fresh vegetables, cereals, meat and milk, and not too many burgers and fizzy drinks. The children are on holiday so they want to have fun, but remember that the primary purpose is to improve their health. You will be welcome to take part in all the outings and activities and your own children will enjoy these too.



### What if we are both at work?

Unless the group can make some alternative arrangements, it is really necessary for one of you to be available when the children are at home.

### Would we need to get involved with the local group?

Yes, it is important that you don't just agree to host and then disappear for the next six months! When you go along to the meetings you will get to meet other members and soon feel part of the group. You can help to organise the

activities which will take place during the children's visit, and to raise the funds needed to bring them over. You may have skills or contacts which would be useful to the group in raising money and planning the outings. Many of the fund raisers organised by groups are also enjoyable social events and you will find that you make many new friends. It is also important that you understand as much as possible about the children coming to visit you, and about the charity and its work.



### Do the children speak English?

In most cases the answer is no, or just a little. Each group of children comes with an interpreter, and we provide phonetic phrase books to help you communicate. You will also find Russian phrases spoken phonetically if you look at our website.



### Is it expensive to host children?

No, it should not be, and in fact we ask families NOT to spend a lot of money on their visiting children. Please don't buy them expensive gifts or designer gear, as this will put intolerable pressure on other families. Some of the children have an insatiable appetite for fruit, which can be expensive, so many groups get help from their local church in collecting fresh fruit and vegetables to pass on to families.

***We hope that you will decide to get involved with your local Chernobyl Children's Project group and bring some Belarusian children into your home. We are sure you will find it a rewarding experience.***



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