

Team member's highlights 2008

Good behaviour of kids and relationship between kids and councillors was very good.

Michael

Travelling to Russia with a KOI team was a giant step in to the unknown for us. We were taking our two daughters, age 4 and 2, with us and we really had no idea what to expect. The absolute highlight was the children who were so friendly and responsive. Although they seemed very happy and taken care of, they needed to hear the gospel message as much as disadvantaged children. Our best days were spent just playing with them – they loved Uno, hand ball, - and we were fortunate to have a really experienced member on our team who encouraged us to take it slowly, not to get ahead of God, and just to get to know the kids as much as we could before running any programmes. It was 5 or 6 days before we did anything scheduled and that was perfect.

Our daughters – thank the Lord – responded really well and were a great icebreaker with the kids who were desperate to play with them and it is proof that friends don't need to speak the same language. It was beautiful that the one girl who was often left out or picked on by the others become our 2-year-old's favourite and they spent hours together playing and cuddling.

There were some very tiring times when we wondered if we would make it to the end but we started everyday singing, worshipping and praying with the team and this filled us with the energy we needed for each day this trip, which was very costly to us in many ways. **It was a very special time for our family and will become a part of our family's story.** We hope the Russian kids got as much out of it as we did.

Also you don't realise it when you sing up, but taking on a project like this gives God such opportunity to clean things up in your own life, before, during and after camp. Before I had even gotten on the plane, I had dealt with so many issues in my life that God clearly said could not come to Russia with me and I know if I hadn't come, hadn't taken that step of faith, those issues would remain.

Praise God. I hope one day we can come back.

Megan

Being welcomed so warmly by the camp director and the rest of the camp.

We were welcomed by the leaders of the orphanage group and able to build up good relationships with them once again. Last year this was very difficult due to the suspicion of the leaders who thought we were a cult. To be able to meet them again was such a gift of God!

Jenny

Having just left my second KOI camp I wondered at the comparison. The campsites, the team dynamics, my personal sense of purpose all vastly different.

Last camp on the first day I met a young teen whom I instinctively knew was my mission, my reason for coming. This time no-one vied for special attention; there was a greater need just to float and play with kids as they came by.

However, having no particular focus or highlight did not make this camp any less satisfying. That sense of fulfilment was just as great in knowing that our message of Christ's love had reached over 250 children, with seeds sown in the hearts of some, and further nurtured in others.

Many people don't understand why I would come once, let alone twice. Well, it's beyond my understanding also. All I know is that I'm already saying "next time..." Maybe it's that sense of special blessing when you cuddle a lovely soul, kiss away tears, watch a little face light up. There is no shortage of children wanting play, needing hugs, craving praise.

Was it worth the time and effort fundraising and preparing programmes or experiencing financial stress? These answers I can give simply and without hesitation – absolutely.

Maree

The highlight for this camp was the program. The program seemed to be very well received by the kids and very well implemented by the team.

Peter

A highlight for me has been sensing a small orphan boy get so excited about his mouse that he made, that he had no words, just mouth and eyes wide open trying to express himself but not having the words.

Emily

It has been great to be able to come back to the camp. Coming to a place that you are familiar with does make the transition easier. I am happy that the program we had planned has been a huge success. To see the teenagers really listen to our message of saying no to drugs was great. Also to see the children become excited and keen to learn about the gospel bracelets was awesome.

There are many things that made this trip a success and I know that the seeds we have planted, God will, in His time, flourish. *To see the children smile and reach for a hug, will stay in my heart forever.*

Klariske

The highlight for me is always seeing kids with their Bibles and the enjoyment the kids get when we come back to see them.

Andrew

Highlights:

- 1) Happy, smiling kids
- 2) Child going home with Bible in hand

Daniel

The opportunity to sit with a child in silence with the language barrier but still feel the presence of the holy spirit and the love that we can share – very precious!

Jacalyn

This trip to Russia was an amazing experience. The children over here are so much fun! I made many friends with the kids and being a 19 year old I found that I could relate to the councillors very easily, and made friends among many of them too. We had a very diverse team this year with grandparents and grandchildren, but every one of the team played such an important role in the lives of the kids. Russia is definitely for anyone, especially if you love kids. I had a great time and hope to come back again one day.

Jonathan

The smiling faces of the children at your every turn makes it very worthwhile.

The response of many children and councillors to the gospel bracelet and the desire to receive a Bible for themselves is evidence of the working of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Robin

The openness of the kids and majority of the councillors to us sharing the Gospel. The friendliness and smiles of the kids and councillors. Some adult staff asking for bracelets and Bibles.

Dennis

The ability to share God's love with people who don't understand your language makes you realise how great and powerful God is. To come to Russia and just love the kids was so much fun. I had a great time.

Amelia, 15 yrs

We did the drug and alcohol health program with a few groups. During this I shared my testimony of when I had been a drug user and was getting drunk a lot. One particular group asked lots of questions afterwards. We finished with this group and after we left a good friend I had made, came running out to see me. He stopped me and asked: "Why did you tell that story? It's not something to be proud of." I was then able to explain that God was the hero of the story and he understood and went away happy.

The other highlight was seeing friends I had made last year again. It meant a lot to come back again and the impact of our love was so much greater.

Sam

My highlight was playing with all the kids and meeting lots of new friends.

Lucinda, 11 yrs

Seeing the joy in a young person's face as they experience God's love and acceptance for themselves. Then making friends with them and receiving that big hug after.

Pam

The relationships we made with so many children this year was a true highlight – their excitement to receive the Bibles, their attentiveness to gospel bracelets – then their excited screams of answers when asked if they had been reading their Bibles. Having the chance to get to know these beautiful little lives a little deeper was a real joy.

This was definitely the best time we have ever had in Russia.

Leigh

It is such a great experience to be with the children in the camp. Children's hearts are so open to hear what we have to share. It is fantastic to be part of a culture that is so hungry to hear about God. God's word calls us to go to the nations and Love for Kids – Russia is the perfect opportunity to sow into the next generation and see Russia won for Christ.

Daniel

This is my first trip to Russia and I have been joined by my wife Pam and daughters Ashleigh and Jacalyn. My experience at the camp exceeded my expectations and has left me with memories that will stay with me for life. I have enjoyed the hospitality of the camp staff however the pure delight of getting to know the children has been my highlight. To share my life and faith with the children has been a privilege and I pray that I have, through God's grace, touched some of them in a positive way that will help them in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity.

Paul

On the second last day we were doing craft with a group of 12/13 year olds and I asked them if any of them had been reading their Bibles and a few of them said yes and then a girl started very excitedly to relate how she has read all about Adam and Eve and related the whole story whilst being interrupted by a few others all trying to tell what they had read. One of the girls that was interpreting was one of the real tough kids. She had been reading about Noah's ark and very excited to tell us all about it.

In the first few days I met two brothers. They would jump all over you and try to teach me rude words. **The whole team kept loving them and by the end of the camp their behaviour had improved heaps and they would just run up and cuddle you.** When I asked one of them if he had been reading his Bible, he excitedly told me that he had read all about when Jesus died on the cross for our sins.

Andre

It was amazing to see how open the children were when we shared personal stories from our own lives. They responded well to us and were very friendly and welcoming from the first day.

Kirstie

Just getting to know a lot of the kids and simply being their friend and saying hey and smiling, a lot of the kids start to look up to you and want to be with you.

Rosalie, 15 yrs

The highlight of my time I spent in camp was seeing God work in unexpected ways. When I thought the mountains were too high to climb, God moved the mountains, and even if I only changed one kid's life, this was all worth it.

Elaine

When I was in the camp two years ago, I became friends with one girl. She was here again this year. She told me that two years ago I showed her the truth and gave her a Bible. It was fantastic to hear this. She had lots of questions for our interpreters. I believe God is working in her heart. Russia is an amazing country with kids crying out for the truth. I will be praying for this girl.

Jason

Meeting kids and making good lasting friends with some of them.

I met one kid in particular. There were two kids with the same name in the group and they both came and held my hand and said I should make a wish. One of them became good friends with me. Every time I would see her she would run up saying my name, and give me a big hug. Giving her a Bible and getting her email address was very special for me. Saying goodbye was very hard. But it was very worth it for the friend I have made.

Kenneth

I felt that we were bouncing from one group to another what with introductions, activities, programs and bush-dancing, all very busy.

We were informed not to come on too strong about Jesus at the beginning, but it was great to be able to give out so many Bibles in the end. The kids were open to this and were keen to have us sign them which opened the door to our blessing comments. All good.

Richard

A 14-year-old girl kept coming to me the whole two weeks of the camp. The light of Jesus kept drawing her, but she didn't understand why, until I handed her a Bible and shared I was a Christian. She was surprised and just so interested to know and learn more. My interpreter spoke to her in Russian about her church as she wants to go to it. She didn't know that there is a church, where you can worship Jesus freely & praise him. I could see God touch her life and I believe she will be His one day.

An 11-old boy became my close little friend. He was just so easy to love. He could not speak English but language wasn't an issue where there is 'Jesus love'. He always waited for me to appear from my lodgings and we would play table tennis or sit and talk through an interpreter. I can say very easily that he captured my heart and I love him. The gospel has been shared with him, the seeds sown and I know they went into fertile soil. God is good!

Margaret

I personally think this camp was one of the best things I have done in my life. The kids at the camp were amazing, everything about them. Just the way they all look up to you, young or old. It opens so many doors and you are able to share with them. It just is a blessing.

Luke

A highlight for me was when the coolest of the cool teenager (who didn't really speak to us for the first week) to up at 5:30 in the morning to say goodbye to us on the day of our departure.

Andrew

Camp has been a real joy this year, although we have been kept very busy. I have found it relaxing, as our team has worked so beautifully together, each one playing their part. Our interpreters have done a fantastic job and we really appreciate and value them so much.

We were given two hours every day for our clubs with the children. Initially we had only a small number of children coming to the Bible club, but as we prayed most of the children came and were very responsive to the gospel.

God also answered our prayer for the orphans, as this year we were able to spend more time with them.

Margaret and Lynda took them for an hour each day with craft, games and Bible stories and they did the bracelet. Most of them received Jesus as their best friend.

Over all it was a very rewarded and enjoyable experience.

And we know that God has done a very real work in the hearts and lives of the children.

June

Small camp, 5 councillors and 55 children, and a few sports teams

Lovely to have a friend of ours back as director. She gave us a two hour slot in the afternoon for our Bible clubs and virtually left us to it. Clubs were voluntary of course. We were allowed to show the Jesus movie and give out Bibles.

Younger children, especially the boys, didn't want to come to Bible club. We wondered if their parents said they couldn't. Most of the older group came. We ministered to orphans – played with them in morning, did Bible with them in afternoons. Orphans prayed sinners prayer and many other kids too. We did a birthday party for one of the orphans, inviting them all. We did craft every day.

The camp programme this year was a lot quieter, more free time. We did a few items for concerts and as usual had dancing classes. The children who came to our clubs had a lot of fun.

We worked well together as a team and enjoyed ourselves.

The interpreters were great.

Maureen

An orphan boy of about 11 was lying, cheating, kicking, shouting. We started to pray for him in the team prayer meetings. Then Linda did the story of Jesus calming the sea. Linda got the children to act it out as she told the story and chose that particular orphan boy to be Jesus. He was visibly moved. From then on he made sure that everyone behaved. He has since prayed the sinner's prayer in the story of 'Don Jaw' the camp misfit. Praise the Lord!

One boy was a real bully. I rebuked anger, hatred, violence, praying in English! From then on he was placid. We are still praying that he will accept the Lord Jesus.

Story of the lost sheep. I explained that we are all like this naughty sheep who wanted to do his own thing and not listen to others. We need to say sorry to Jesus for all the wrong naughty things we do and ask Him to be our best friend and Lord and Saviour. All the children prayed with one voice. Praise the Lord!

It was my birthday. The team sang happy birthday, gave me a beautifully wrapped gift of shower gel and a NZ key ring. Then in the afternoon gave me a birthday cake and a bunch of flowers. I was SO blessed. Praise the Lord!

Margaret

The highlight of camp for me was when we showed the Jesus movie to the orphans. The whole time that the movie was playing, they just watched and asked questions. They were just as engrossed in the story that was playing out before them. At the end of the movie, some of them prayed the prayer that is at the end of the movie. It was amazing to see how even a very simple explanation of the gospel can have such an impact.

Melanie

I liked the fact that even though I didn't come prepared with any crafts or Bible stories, I was still able to do things like teaching songs, helping with other crafts and just having fun with the kids.

Cara

Enjoyed being part of the team from New Zealand. We all had different gifting and we were all used by God to reach the kids and the orphans.

And I praise the Lord for that. We all had Joy.

Linda

I had another really great experience at camp this year. This year we had a lot more opportunities to spend time with the orphans in our camp. We were able to see a lot of the same children we met last year, so it was great to see them again. On the last day we were able to show the Jesus movie to the orphan group. Many of them prayed the prayer at the end.

Sarah

I loved meeting all the people that I met and I hope to see them again.

Kenneth

A young girl wrote me a letter and told me she was going to miss me. **It's good to know that I made a difference to a person's life.**

Jim

Highlight was received so much love from the kids even though there was a language barrier.

Seeing the kids receive God's word enthusiastically.

Surein

Having the experience of been able to give some of God's love to others.

Kevin

Sharing my testimony at one of the programs and having one of the teenage girls come up at the end affected by God. The connection with her and God was awesome. She invited Jesus into her heart straight after the program.

Theresa

God's faithfulness after an initial challenging start. It was great to see children and staff deciding for Christ. A trainee psychologist said after the first program (and a brief story about Moses), that he didn't like foreigners preaching to the children... (which we weren't). By the end of the time he didn't miss a program and was asking for a Bible and wanted a gospel outline. It's amazing how God turns people's hearts.

Kevin

It was great to be able to use my skills in video editing to be able to shoot and edit a fun short film that the teenagers here wrote and starred in.

I have made some great friendships at this camp and I hope that I have had a positive influence with an injection of life and fun!

Andrew

This has been a life changing experience for me as for years I have been praying for the country of Russia and for the last few years God has been laying mission work on my heart. After spending time doing mission work in Russia I now know that it is definitely my calling and I can't wait to see what God has in store for me!

When we visited a home orphanage, a family adopted children into their home, it was great to see kids in a home filled with so much Godly love – they have opened their home to 18 orphans!

I just loved spending time with the kids, playing sport with them as well as sitting around and laughing at how bad my Russian was. The kids are so open and just tap up any attention and love you show them – I can't wait till next year.

Jessica

Our camp is fantastic. When we arrived we received the most warm welcome imaginable. All the children were so excited to see us.

We have had an awesome experience getting to know the children and the leaders. We have really enjoyed forming relationships with them and loving them. One of the really exciting and important times is what they call candles. Where the kids sit in their groups and talk. This really give us a chance to get to know the kids.

Jennifer

I love so much about the camps but to summarise in a few points:

Being with the kids

Meeting / befriending leaders

Gospel dramas

Singing Russian songs

Eating Russian food

Dancing at discotechs

Playing sports with kids

Meeting families involved with the very exciting home orphanage program. This opportunity was very exciting.

Arianna

I came to camp to give myself, but the kids gave us so much we were treated like celebrities, were so excited to just be around us.

Amy

Being a usual church goer, I was surprised by the sexualised dancing in the discos. We found out, by the 'day of love', that these guys see love as something physical.

I only wish that we could stay longer and teach them more about God's love!

Matt

It was amazing to see how God worked on this trip. It was very challenging but the team were so supportive and it was great to know that God was with us and protecting us. I had some injuries and pain on the trip and it was so comforting to see God working in those situations. One of the highlights was visiting the home orphanages, as orphanages have been put on my heart by God.

I think it was great to see the opportunities that God opened up for us right from the start. We had the opportunity to share the gospel with the children through a play on the second night. The children were so open and friendly towards us and it was so good to get to know them and love them.

It was an amazing , faith-stretching opportunity. Thank you for organising it.

God bless.

Janelle

My highlight of the camp was staying up late with some of the Russian leaders attempting to learn more Russian words, eating lots of food and having a good time.

Another highlight was being welcomed as we arrived at the camp. All the kids were lined up along the driveway to the camp, as we were welcomed with singing, shouting and dancing. We were offered a traditional Russian welcoming meal, bread & salt, given gifts and made to feel very welcome.

David

Tonight in the disco I danced and played with a little girl. It was wonderful to be able to muck around with her and to see the laughter and innocent joy on her face as we twirled – so much better than the provocative dancing she usually did and that was going on around us.

The camp leaders were very open and welcoming to us. They supported an opportunity for us to perform the 'choices' play on the second night we were there! They also came to night relaxing times with us and we all sang together. They genuinely seemed to enjoy having us there.

The first time we met with the leaders to sing and hang out we sang some Christian songs to them in English they listened quietly and at the end they said that it had reminded them of good times and when they were children – peace and love. It was beautiful that they felt that – felt God's presence without even being aware of it.

Heather

I really enjoyed this year's trip. The relationships that we were able to develop with the children, leaders and directors was great.

Thank you for this opportunity.

Mark

Highlight

Seeing the smiling faces of some of the 8-year-old girls each day. They were very friendly and I loved giving them piggy backs!

Shenae

To see the kids hear the word and love for God. The facial expressions showed that they children understood Jesus' love. A group of boys then prayed every night together after hearing God's message.

Jade

The highlight for me was spending the day visiting two families who have taken in street kids. Seeing the beautiful smiles on the children warmed my heart and viewing the love shared between the families highlighted the truth that all we need in life is God's love.

Rebecca

- Getting to know the kids and being able to communicate with them.
- Going to visit the orphanages
- Being part of an awesome team.

Eliana

Spending time with the kids at camp.

Jessica

I loved the contact with the kids and the leaders. The language was a challenge and at times was a barrier. The interpreters worked tirelessly and made this easier.

One of the highlights was the visit to the family home orphanages.

Another wonderful part of the time at camp was the opportunity to talk with the leaders about Jesus and the openness of the directors and children.

The master classes were great because we got to be alongside the kids for 40 minutes – it was great to witness to the craft leaders by our love for the children.

Debbie

It was great just to get to know some of the children. Quite a few of them were my age, and they were all warm and welcoming. But it was sad towards the end of the camp as we had children going out and new ones coming in. We had started growing close and so many of them were crying or had eyes watering. [I'm definitely glad I came this year because it really was a great experience.](#)

Jennifer, 14 yrs

This year again it has been such an incredible blessing to spend two weeks in a rehabilitation Centre in Vladivostok. I could see God's heart in these kids ranging in age from 3-18. The orphan kids really touched me.

The kids would often break rank when being taken to the meal room, and would run up to us to get a cuddle.

The kids are so starved of affection, many of them being abandoned by their parents. There were other kids with disabilities from an orphanage near Vladivostok. They were so happy to be spending time at the centre, where they would receive love from Aussies and participate in fun activities. I noticed one girl aged about 12-13 with a severe deformity on one side of her face. Initially she was very reserved and when we spoke to her about Jesus, she walked away. Then in the next day as we handed out Bibles to the kids, she was the only one who refused to accept it. Seeing the excitement on the other kids faces, this little girl asked if she too could have a Bible and asked the Aussie team members to sign it.

Dennis

During the first two days, while we were getting to know the children, the whole team were scattered into groups with the orphan children playing games. One of the boys aged five would walk up to each of the Australians and start to hit them, firstly with his fists and then later with a skipping rope. We tried to involve him in our games only to find that when we threw a ball to him he would run towards the dormitories and throw the ball away. He just had so much anger in him. When we tried to take a photo of him he would grab the camera, if you tried to shake his hand he would try to rip your watch off your wrist. This was the same for 2-3 days, so we prayed for him.

Within a few days we learnt his name and bridges were built and then we saw a different boy. Every time we were near him he would run to the three men in the team and give us a great big hug, rather than a smack. He would then get in trouble from the carers because at every meal time he would 'break ranks' and run to us for more hugs.

What a change, instead of anger we saw a loving child needing affection. There are many more just like this boy, starved of affection, needing love. Hopefully when we leave the rehab centre many of these children will know of Jesus' love when they read their Bibles.

I will never forget that smile as he ran to me for a great big hug.

Ed

To return to the rehab centre has turned out to be a blessing for all of us.

To meet some of the children from last year and also the leaders and the medical staff plus the receptionists and kitchen staff.

The past fortnight has been an awesome journey of God's love for all of us.

Every day was special. The day I met two boys who have severe handicapped legs to play football with them and talk to them was just awesome.

They just glowed with love and joy even though they have it so hard and tough each day. They are so full of life and bright.

I am so glad to have come to Russia again this year with God's blessing the whole time spent here has been so humbling, rewarding and inspirational spiritually it is beyond words to explain.

All you out there tell God you are available for him to send you somewhere of his choosing and you will then know the joy of being in the mission field.

It is just awesome.

Danny

This is the first time I have been overseas. I feel so privileged to be a part of KOI.

It's amazing how much love you can show to children who don't speak the same language as you. Giving hugs to the orphans as they walk through the dining room is so special and you can tell how much it means to these precious children who are craving love. Giving out smiles to children who are hurting is so simple yet so valuable. I realised how important it is to be a role model to the children in the way we behave towards each other as the children are constantly watching us and copying us. I am so glad to be a part of this team. I have been challenged about materialism as we have so much yet these children lack so much in comparison. I pray that these children will seek God and that we will have impacted them by pointing them to our God who love them so much. I'm thinking of coming again next year.

Bonnie

We have to remember that by what God has called us to do is to witness to all, near and far, young and old, rich and poor.

This experience has given me the opportunity to do all of that, reaching out to different people. The people I left behind, friends, clients, work and family. The children in the rehab centre, the leaders and interpreters. We are all the same under God's banner of his children.

It's been amazing to see the response from every group and how God is working through them from his powerful ministry.

Hearts are being softened and mended through God's love. We are his vessels, giving hope, faith and love, the greatest being love to those who are hurt, lost and afraid. What a great privilege to God's work.

Tynan

My highlights

- Able to generously give 50 unique graffiti pieces with young people's names as the main picture
- To utilise the communication language of drawing to connect and build strong relationships with both camp staff and kids.
- Decisions for Jesus were made over a short period.
- Seeing several counsellors also make decisions to follow Jesus.

Matthew

Impacting the lives of two kids that became very close to the team. Two kids that responded really well to us spending time with them, and in this simplicity of act of love, the innocence of children talked about by Jesus, two lives changed.

That was it as well as the whole camp experience.

Nathan

This was a really full on experience. We were taken such good care of us through it all.

The kids and counsellors accepted us and as a group we were able to lead kids to Jesus.

We spent the majority of our time playing and loving them.

The second week I went to a youth camp and helped a friend deal with a devastating loss in her family.

For me I can't describe a highlight. I love the kids and I love Russia!

Elizabeth

What an amazing and memorable trip it's so hard to single out one highlight.

When kids say they want Jesus in their life within 24 hours that's a big highlight. A little boy was standing at the gate of the camp watching the Australian team leave with tears streaming down his face. All the kids were crying and saying how much they loved the team and the camp director praising the team. It was a great end to a story.

Roger

While on camp there was a girl that we made friends with and she followed us around a bit. After the camp I kept getting texts messages from her with more and more questions about life....I didn't really know how to answer them so I just kept giving her bible verses to look up as we had given her a bible on camp. She asked some really tough questions so I told her to go and talk to the interpreters that were still there on the camp with a 2nd team.... the interpreter spoke to her more about God and through this she gave her heart to God and became a Christian. **God still works long after we are gone.**

Jonathan

An experience that makes you ask the question of 'has the personal journey I have been on in life actually been missing something much deeper and authentic than I had considered or realised?'

At first, when approached about going to Russia to play and spend time with kids in an ex-pioneer camp, it sounds like a real Christmas holidays with the extended family at some major caravan or summer park. You hear "your team will be working with 400 Russian kids from a diversity of socio-economic standards and lifestyles" - from orphans spending a month away from the orphanage to kids of major city companies' employees having 'summer break' away from mum and sometimes....dad. But I can't speak Russian! Once the decision is made to go, it feels a bit daunting to invest into a trip that I don't even know what I'm in for. Going from winter frosts to summer shorts and caps - in 24 hours. My experience with the kids in the summer camp was amazing. These young people, as diverse as they are, have a contrast of life that I have only seen on occasions in Australia. These kids play and create amazing somethings out of nothings all day everyday. Yet there is a lack within them; they have empty eyes when it comes to true life within. The mission of Love for Kids - Russia is simple - Love the kids to Jesus through quality time, playing, creating - giving what we all desire in our lives to kids that do not really get it.

Matt