

Terror victims receive relief for soles, hope for souls

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Staff and volunteers with Russian Ministries, a partner of Buckner and Shoes for Orphan Souls, personally delivered shoes to children in Beslan and Chechnya which helped open doors for further Christian ministry in the mostly Muslim-populated region. (Photos courtesy of Russian Ministries)

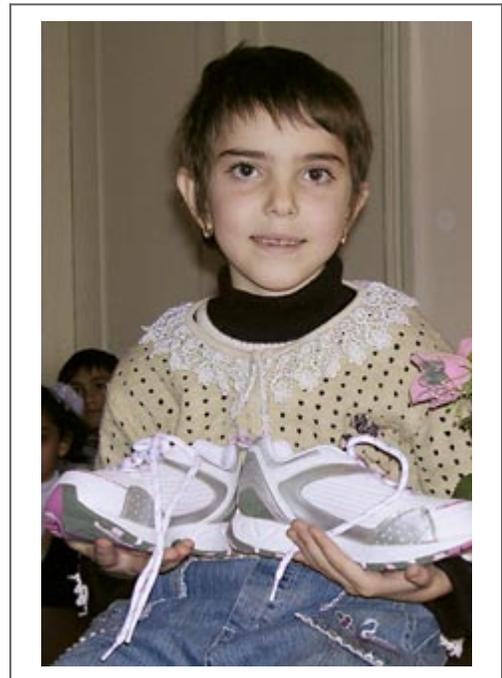
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By Russ Dilday

Buckner International

Thousands of children in war-torn regions of Beslan, Russia, and Grozny, Chechnya, recently received thousands of pairs of shoes donated through the [Buckner Shoes for Orphan Souls](#) drive.

Russian Ministries, a Christian group that collaborates with Buckner for ministry, distributed the shoes as part of a larger evangelistic effort to reach children and their families in the mostly Muslim-populated areas with the message of Christ.



Children orphaned by the terrorist attacks on Sept. 1, 2004 in Beslan received new shoes last December thanks to the Buckner Shoes for Orphan Souls shoe drive.

Beslan is the site of the [Sept. 1, 2004, terrorist attack](#) on School No. 1, which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of children and parents on the first day of the school year.

Orphan and low-income children in Beslan received many of the donated shoes, which Vladimir Pliev, a deacon for Transfiguration Church there, said “provided a wonderful opportunity to build relationships with thousands of children from all of the daycare centers, preschools, schools and orphanages in the entire Beslan County.”

The shoes were gratefully received, and the effort opened doors for more ministry in the region, he said.

“The most touching and emotional meetings took place while we were distributing shoes on behalf of our loving brothers and sisters in the U.S. to those whose destiny was changed as a result of the terror attack at School No. 1 ... when the evil hand of terrorists took the lives of many parents, brothers, sisters and friends,” Pliev said.

The shoes bolstered inroads Pliev and other Christians already had been making into the community. He noted that Alina Plieva was among the children taken hostage in the 2004 attack. When her parents arrived at the school that day, panicked over the plight of their only child, Pliev urged them to pray to God to save their daughter. “They immediately responded and now believe that prayer saved their daughter’s life.”

Alina escaped death with facial scarring from shrapnel but has since recovered and called Pliev at the beginning of the distribution of shoes.

She “asked if she could bring her two cousins,” he said. “They all came, along with hundreds of other families and received the wonderful blessing of this free gift.”

The tragedy at School No. 1 has affected the community for generations, casting a pall of sorrow over thousands. Oleg Aziev, a volunteer from Transfiguration Church, said he noticed a sad-faced girl in the line to receive shoes and inquired about her.

“I asked her caregivers about her, and they told me that Alana is a true orphan,” he said. “She lost her entire family, except her elderly grandmother at School No. 1 when it was attacked by terrorists.”

Aziev picked up the girl, and held her. “I felt sorrow overflow in my heart. In my culture, it is not acceptable for a man to cry, but I found it hard to hold back my tears.”

Marina Kairova, a Russian Ministries staff member, is a counselor for the organization’s Beslan Youth Center. She emphasized that the shoes will do more than reach the children’s hearts; they also will reach their minds.

“Ludmila, the director of School No. 6 in Beslan, where many of the children attend who survived ... the terror attack, mentioned that many of her students do not attend class because they do not have warm winter shoes,” Kairova said.

A preschool director pointed out shoe recipients like David, a student who “is fatherless and his mother only receives a small paycheck for doing very hard work in Beslan in order to provide for her son,” Kairova noted.

Another boy, Khetag, who is 14, also received shoes. Khetag has no parents

and five siblings.

“All of these children are being raised by their grandmother, who provides for them by sweeping the streets of Beslan,” Kairova said. “Khetag helps her with this. During the shoe distribution outreach, we gave all six children shoes, socks and a collection of children’s literature and cassettes.”

Another Youth Center worker, who asked not to be identified because of safety concerns, said local residents “haven’t seen much love in this war-torn area (and) were very pleasantly surprised by all of the kindness, care, warmth and attention shown to them.”

“The doors of preschools, schools and the hearts of their directors are now open to partnering with the Christian center in Beslan,” she added. “They are eager to make the school auditoriums available for Christian presentations.”

Gannady Terkun, a pastor and Russian Ministries’ regional director in Vladikavkaz, said the group distributed 12,000 pairs of shoes and socks to 28 schools, daycares and internats—boarding schools that include orphanages—near Grozny, Chechnya, an active war zone.

The humanitarian aid went to “thousands of children who have seen nothing except blood and violence during the past number of years,” he noted.

“After their children received shoes,” Terkun said, “many mothers came to us and tearfully hugged and kissed us as they thanked us for the shoes and repeatedly asked whether they were really a free gift.

“Our workers explained that this gift was given freely by our Christian brothers and sisters in the U.S. on behalf of the Almighty God in the name of Isa (Jesus), who many Muslims believe is another prophet of Allah.”

Terkun thanked Buckner “and all Christians in the U.S. who made this generous gift possible. ... This evangelistic shoe distribution has opened many doors.”

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