



ABRO

Serving the children of Belarus

American Belarussian Relief Organization

Summer Program

Host Family Handbook

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How do we select which child gets to come?

ABRO has a sister organization inside Belarus known as the Ark House. They work with social services, former orphans, the medical community, ABRO chaperones, and even some churches inside Belarus to select and screen children. Other ways children enter the program are word of mouth from friends/relatives or contact with American travelers. ABRO has been around in Belarus for many years, so we often get e-mails from friends or extended family of children who have come before asking that their child be considered.

Children who travel to America may come from normal, intact families, from extremely poor or dysfunctional families, from remote villages, or from large families. Please understand that the radiation affects every socio-economic level and while some of our children are from very low-income families, not all are. Some of the children whose health is affected the most are from Gomel, the second largest city in Belarus. These children often do not appear as needy as children from the village. However, these children need a break from the radiation more than some of the village children due to Gomel's proximity to the Chernobyl Power Plant. Some children do have access to church or are from families that are Believers, others have no access to church and may hear about God for the first time while they are in the US. Those that are from Believing families still desperately need the health benefits from the program and still need a chance to grow in their faith. However, we understand if you feel led to minister to a child who is not from a Believing family. If you are still deciding whether or not to host, or which child to host and want more information please reach out to your coordinator.

Orphans and foster care children are, unfortunately, not able to come through our program currently. You are able to request your child return year after year. ABRO will make every effort to honor requests but cannot guarantee that any child will be able to return.

How can I make my child feel more secure?

Just as you are nervous about meeting your child for the first time, he or she is very nervous too. You can help make the trip from the airport or pick up point to your home less stressful by having the chaperone introduce you to your child. Think of what you would like to have her say to your child before the child arrives. A hug is wonderful, but do not be alarmed if the child stands stiffly and does not return a hug. They are very nervous and do not know you. Don't worry; these children will warm up to you very quickly. A photo of your family and home is a good idea to have and show them.

We will try and provide you information on your child before their arrival. This is usually very limited, but your chaperone will be visiting each of the children before they come and she will provide as much information as she can.

A note about Chaperones

The chaperones are here to ensure the well-being of the children they are in charge of. That means getting them through the travel portion safely but also helping in any way possible throughout the summer. They should be in regular contact with all of the children and their host families.

We want the chaperones to have a fun summer while they are in the US, but please do not forget that they are here on a job. Their job during the summer is to translate for and assist the host families whenever it is needed. This includes translating letters from you to the child's family back home at the end of the summer. The chaperones are also a wealth of knowledge about Belarus and your child. You can really benefit from spending time with them.

While in many situations we see the child as our primary ministry, please keep in mind that some of our chaperones do not know Christ either. The chaperones are a ministry as well! When you can, please include them in your activities. Feel free to ask them to accompany you on trips and other excursions. Typically it is customary for you to pay for excursions you invite the chaperones to. Even though the chaperones are paid a

salary while they are here, they typically need this money to pay bills at home or are saving it for a special purchase here that they could not afford at home. It is ok to have the chaperone pay for some things, but please do not expect them to pay for everything while they are here.

Chaperone's Schedule

Be respectful of the chaperone's schedule while they are here. If your group is large then they may be very busy with doctor's appointments so talk to them in advance before scheduling events or appointments if possible. In the event of a really large group with multiple chaperones, it may be beneficial to divide the children into groups so that each chaperone is used equally.

Activities

Keep the schedule and activities light the first week. They are still suffering from jet lag and are exhausted from the long trip. They are also trying to get acquainted to our activities, customs and material wealth. Low-key activities, games, or videos work well.

An activity is usually scheduled the first week or two so the group can see that their friends. It is good for them to share impressions in their own language, and it is also a good time for host families to discuss the first few days/weeks. Let the kids know that you can help them call each other. A phone call to another ABRO child can be a great cure for a child feeling sad.

The heat and humidity can be a factor in the child wanting to go outside. Host families find it is easier to get them outside in the early in the morning or in the evening when it is a bit cooler. It gets much hotter here and dehydration is an issue. We recommend you keep water bottles, juice boxes and popsicles on hand.

The children generally love to swim! Safety note: do not take the child's word that they know how to swim! Please notify the lifeguards that you have a child that may not be a great swimmer. They or you should have the child try to swim across the shallow end of

a pool and evaluate them the first time at a pool. If they can't swim, please use a swim vest or other swim device. Please consider getting them swimming lessons. Children need to be instructed not to jump off the diving board until the person in the pool makes it to the ladder. They also tend to be a little rough in the pool and lifeguards will need your assistance in watching and disciplining the children.

Other favorite activities include: arts & crafts, drawing, board games, bicycling, and a variety of sports. Please use electronics in moderation. Children can easily become addicted and lose interest in other activities. Host families tend to contact one another to arrange activities together or to swap kids for a day. It is also great to encourage host families to invite other host families to activities with them. For example, if your family is going to the zoo one day, send a message to other families that you are going so they can join if they want! If nobody does, it is fine because you were going anyways. If other do, great! It will be a memorable event for everyone.

Do not feel you have to do something each day. The beauty of the ABRO program is exposing the children to normal family life. One of the most difficult things is trying not to over-indulge them, but trust us, overdoing it is not good for you or the child.

Church Activities

We are a Christian organization and desires that host families to share their faith with the children and chaperones. Families are encouraged to continue with your usual Christian activities of devotions, going to Bible studies, saying prayers at meals, watching Christian programs and movies, and listening to Christian music (and whatever else you do normally!).

The coordinators will arrange for a special Bible study time for the children in Russian. Depending on the dynamics of your group that may be during the Sunday School hour at church, or more likely, will be during another designated time during the week. Please have your children at church as much as possible.

Sending your child to a VBS or backyard clubs is encouraged. Your child will be more comfortable if they are in the same group as another ABRO child or with one of your own children. Please speak with your coordinator if you need help enrolling the child in a VBS program.

It can take years before a child has enough understanding of our language to comprehend Christian teaching. Our faith will shine through our daily lives. Just be sensitive and respectful of their spiritual condition, and not overload or force it on them. Please let the coordinator know if your child professes faith in Christ. Encourage your child to pray in their own language during devotions or before meals. You may not understand what they are saying, but it makes them feel included and part of the family!

Sample group activities in the past have included:

- A welcome party the first week of their visit
- Vacation Bible School (a designated one for Belarussian children)
- Bible study/Sunday School classes
- A farewell party the last week of their visit
- And various other elective group activities throughout their visit, including Fourth of July fireworks, Water Park visits, amusement park visits, zoo visits, and Hiking, among others.

Talk to your coordinator about scheduled activities for your group!

Arrival

The children are extremely tired when they first arrive to the US. The total travel time from their home to yours is well over 30 hours, frequently more. They are usually too excited to sleep on the way over, and that combined with the time change really takes a toll on the children. They will often fall asleep on the ride home, so having a pillow or a blanket in the car is recommended. It may take your child several days to adjust to the change in time and climate, but they will quickly acclimate. Please be patient during this period. Usually by the end of the first week they are fully acclimated.

The chaperone will help with the introductions and briefly tell you about the child's status and any illness during the trip. Keep conversations brief and non-essential questions for another day. It is important to get the tired travelers home as soon as possible. The chaperones are also exhausted after the trip and are ready to get to their home away from home. Let the coordinator know that you are leaving and if the child experienced any problems during the trip. The coordinator will assist you with locating any baggage the child may have brought. New children often arrive with just the clothes they are wearing, a small bag with a very small amount of clothes, and a gift for their host family.

Have your child use the bathroom before leaving the airport, or if your group is meeting the bus from Washington, DC find a place to stop shortly after leaving the pick-up area and encourage the child to use the bathroom, especially if you have a long drive home. There are bathrooms on the bus, so in many cases they may not need to go, but if you do have a long drive home it is good to stop anyways, just in case.

If your group is taking the bus from Washington, DC to North Carolina there will be some snacks and water on the bus.

Your child is likely to arrive with a small gift for you. This is a big part of the Belarussian culture. If you want to give your child a gift at their arrival a stuffed animal (can be gently used) to cuddle and/or a welcome bag is appreciated. See the gifts section for suggestions.

Do not feel obligated to give the child a gift, your hosting them is a gift as well as clothing and other necessities.

Arrival to your Home

Back at your home, the child will probably feel overwhelmed by the size of your home, yard, and furnishings. Introduce them carefully to any pets or remaining family members. If time allows that night, give your child a brief tour of the of the house, especially how to use the bathroom. See the bathroom section below for important

information. Also show them which room is theirs and what storage space is theirs to use. If you arrive home very late and your child is awake, at least show them the bathroom in case they need it during the night. If they are asleep when you arrive home then don't wake them up to do this. It might be a good idea to have a sign that says “**туалет**” on the door to the bathroom, just in case they go looking for it in the night. If you couldn't do the tour the night the child arrives home because it was late or they were asleep, make sure you do it in the morning when everyone is awake.

Bed

In Belarus children may not go to bed until their parents do. In many cases, this is because the living area doubles as a bedroom. Host families find it a bit easier to establish a set bed time and routine with the children. It helps them to know what to expect and settle down. Despite their protests, they usually fall asleep quickly. Having a stuffed animal and a night light help some children not to be afraid or homesick at night. Please report any problems to the chaperone or coordinator. Some children will want to be in a room alone while others will want to sleep in a room with other children. Some children will not be able to handle the door being shut. Be flexible the first few nights until you figure out your child's wants and needs.

How is Belarus Different from the USA? What kind of cultural differences do I need to be aware of?

An Introduction to Belarus

“What is it like in Belarus?” This question is very normal, but surprisingly hard to answer. It's difficult simply because so much is very different in this country half a world away and at least half a century behind in medicine, physical infrastructure development, and whose ideology and culture is still heavily shaped by its recent communist past.

Most things that you can think of are different in Belarus. It is located in Eastern Europe and lies between Poland, Ukraine, and Russia. Its latitude is equivalent to northern Canada, so its climate is colder. In the winter, the sun doesn't fully rise until after 9:00 AM and it sets around 4:00 PM.

It is roughly the size of Kansas and almost as flat and fertile. Outside of the cities, the land alternates between village farmland and forested areas.

Radiation is a unique hazard in Belarus. On many trips, Americans passed by many roads that were closed and marked at least with a hazard sign if not a guard's station. Books describe ghost towns with items left just as they were when villages had to evacuate in the weeks and months after the Chernobyl disaster. Some areas are beginning to be opened to the public and repopulated. It is uncertain if these areas are indeed safe. Many areas are still closed off and it is required to have permission in order to visit them.

What is familiar in Belarus? The people. Despite vast differences, we are not that different from Belarussians. Just like most Americans, they grow up, go to school, go to work, get married and raise families. As Belarus becomes more and more opened to the West, cities are becoming more familiar. Many cities have built large grocery stores similar to ours. Keep in mind that while the cities are looking more and more familiar, very few families can afford to use many of these amenities.

Over the next several pages we will dive into what life is like in Belarus and what differences you can expect. I hope that you will find all of this information helpful!

Housing

A typical house in the village is a small wooden frame or cement block cottage heated by a wood stove. In many cases there is no running water or sewer system in these homes. However, some of these homes are getting these amenities as the government begins to lay pipes to the larger areas. The average house has 4 to 15 people living in

it, because a lot of homes house multi-generational families. Most homes have a small vegetable garden and may have animals such as goats, chickens or pigs.

In cities, (and in some of the smaller towns) your child will typically live in a high-rise apartment. While they offer heating and plumbing, the families are again crowded into tiny living spaces, often shared with other family members. Individual apartments usually do not have thermostats that can be adjusted. The building's heat is controlled by radiators that are turned on and off by the city. Some of the newer buildings do have the ability to regulate temperature, but it is a control on the radiator, not central heat or air like we are used to. You will not find air conditioning in pretty much any home in Belarus, and certainly not in the homes of the children we bring.

Most housing has a mud room/storage closet just inside the main door. As in many countries, it is customary to remove shoes before entering the living quarters. It might be a good idea to designate a shoe area if you don't already have one or instruct the child on what to do with their shoes.

Economy and Income

The inflation rate in Belarus is extreme. In May 2003 the exchange rate for 1 US Dollar equaled about 2,000 Belarussian Rubles. In comparison, in May 2015 1 US Dollar equals 14,300 Belarussian Rubles. In July 2016 Belarus had to devalue their currency because of the massive inflation. They created a new currency that dropped the last 4 zeros off the end of the old money. Now 1 USD = 2 Belarussian Rubles. However, the cost of things did not change.

The average income in Belarus is \$300 USD. Even lower in smaller towns and villages. However, many expenses are comparable to what we would see in the US. Until recently, the Russian economy was doing much better and many families had to send members there to work. However, with the recent drop in the Russian economy, many of these family members are now out of work.

Having children in foreign summer programs also reduce the strain on family budgets. Not to mention the new clothes and shoes that come home with the child are things many families could not provide their child on their own. The money families save during the summer months or other monetary gifts that are sent home usually go into home improvements or furnishings. Things that families cannot afford on their own budgets.

Credit cards and loans are out of reach of most families in Belarus. The interest rate is 20% or higher so families choose not to buy things on credit unless absolutely necessary. Even mortgages are out of reach for most families. Families save and save and save for items that they need.

The Belarussian people live frugally, grow vegetables in the country, and reuse items as much as possible. As a result, there is very little household waste, only one small wastebasket a day. Children who come to visit are shocked at the things we throw away. They also will save all sorts of items and trinkets we tend to discard. It can be hard for them to choose which items to leave behind when packing to leave.

Children's Health

The government of Belarus will not permit a child with significant illness to travel abroad. Children are immunized when young.

The ABRO guidelines require the group receive basic exams soon after arriving and any follow-up care as needed. **The chaperone must be present at all medical and dental appointments, unless chaperone decides otherwise.** Please reach out to your coordinator with questions about doctor's appointments.

Please be on time to all appointments since the staff is providing free care, often after hours or during personal time.

Physical

Host families may find that the Belarussian children get tired more quickly than U.S. children do. Headaches, nosebleeds, poor skin color, many bruises and slow-healing

sores are not uncommon. This could be caused from weakened immune systems and/or poor nutrition.

Please encourage your child to eat vitamins daily. They seem to prefer the gummy vitamins over the chewable kind.

Each child receives a physical while here. Doctors should carefully listen for a heart murmur which is a possible sign of heart problems. If any abnormality is detected, the child should go to a cardiologist for a consult.

Please note that dehydration is a problem with the children. Please keep them well hydrated when outside. They are not accustomed to our heat and humidity and it is likely that they will get dehydrated faster than your own child may.

Dental

Dental services, even in the major centers, were equivalent to what we had in the 50s or 60s, and numbing treatment, such as Novocain, typically costs extra. This explains why even the chaperones don't believe that a trip to the dentist can be painless. Please be gentle with the children's fears-they have good reason to be frightened. In Belarus, most believe it is better to endure a toothache than a trip to the dentist.

Oral hygiene is not seen as a priority in Belarus, especially in villages. Families may or may not have toothbrushes and toothpaste. If they do, they might only brush once a day, if that. Flossing is not typically common.

The water in Belarus is not fluorinated, so if a dentist offers to give a child a fluoride treatment, please do. Please have the hygienist demonstrate how to properly brush and floss your teeth. Please ask them to brush their teeth at least twice a day.

Vision

Children and Chaperones do not typically receive regular eye exams in Belarus. Those who have glasses or contacts usually have the wrong lenses for their vision. Children cry terribly when they need glasses because they are afraid of being made fun of, however getting a vision exam is extremely important. We have found so many children that have vision issues or need glasses and do not have them. When they return home with glasses suddenly school participation increases and grades improve. Their poor school performance was due to not being able to see the board or read their books!

Illness

Just like your own child, your Belarussian child may get sick this summer. The insurance covers illnesses such as the flu, strep throat, etc. It does have a \$250 deductible. Speak to your coordinator if you have concerns about paying this, there may be funds available to help with this. You can also explain the situation to the doctor and many times they will see the child for free. As long as it is not an emergency, please follow the instructions on the insurance letter for finding a doctor in your area that is familiar with the insurance. If your child gets sick, please notify the coordinator and chaperone right away.

With minor aches and pains many Belarussians find that a cup of hot tea helps. We recommend that you have a box on hand during the summer. Giving the children over the counter medication is ok, just please follow the instructions on the box and keep in mind that the Belarussian children are often smaller than US children your own age. If there are any questions or concerns please reach out to a doctor.

Emergencies

In the event of an emergency please contact your group coordinator and the chaperone ASAP. The coordinator should notify the ABRO office right away via call or text. The chaperone needs to be present at the hospital or any emergency care facilities

regardless of age. If you do not have a coordinator or chaperone assigned to your group please notify the ABRO office (336-407-6062 – call or text) of the emergency.

Bathroom and Grooming Habits

Toilets

In Belarus, those who live in newer apartments have modern/western toilets. However, the children from rural homes often do not. Many of the homes have outhouses behind them and are typically “squatters”. Usually they are a wooden box with a hole cut in the middle. The bathrooms in public buildings in these areas are often “squatters” as well, but are typically a porcelain commode with no seat. Toilet paper may or may not be available so it is often unusual for the children to see this in public places here.

The sewage system in Belarus is primitive compared to ours and therefore the way we flush toilets is also different here than it is in Belarus. With the exception of the newer apartment buildings, it is necessary to place used toilet paper in a trashcan in the bathroom in Belarus. You should demonstrate to the child that we flush our toilet paper by taking some toilet paper, make the wiping gesture, throw in toilet, and flush it for them. It may be a good idea to check and empty the trash basket every day for the first week until they remember how we do it. Do explain that only or “*tolka*” (Russian for only) toilet paper can be flushed, otherwise you may find all sorts of things in your toilet! Assure them that the toilet paper is plentiful and that it can be used after urination as well as after a bowel movement. Also, demonstrate the bathroom locks to avoid the child accidentally getting locked in.

Showers

Like the modern toilets, European showers can be found in newer buildings. Faucets will have the hot and cold handles opposite to ours. In the villages, there will likely be no bath or shower facilities in their house. Bathing might be in a banya, which is sort of sauna or steam bath, often communal and in a separate building. They sit in the steam and brush your body with a branch with leaves to cleanse themselves. The custom of

showering every day is not typically observed in Belarus, but this is changing in the cities as more generations are exposed to western culture. In Villages, shower curtains may not be regularly used, so it would be beneficial to show the child how to use it if your child is from a village. And check your bathroom for excess water after the child finishes just to be sure!

Use gestures to communicate hot and cold handles and how to turn the sink and bath/shower on. Also, indicate which bottle is shampoo and conditioner. Their towels tend to be the size of our hand towels, so initially they may use hand towels to dry off instead of the bath towels. Show the child which towel is theirs. Some children don't like to bathe and it can be challenging for host families. Other children like to take multiple showers a day or exceptionally long showers. Figure out a nice balance that works for you and your family. They often forget how to turn off the shower here, so be prepared to help them during their first few days.

Hair Care and Products

Little girls in Belarus tend to have very long hair that they wear in braids or up. Hair tends to tangle easily. Getting a children's shampoo with conditioner helps along with some detangler. Girls find comfort in having their hair braided. It can take time for them to feel comfortable with American style ponytails.

Boys usually arrive or get their hair styled in a buzz style or with a rat-tail. Boys can be rather particular and not want their hair cut or styled.

Some teen girls from the city do have blow dryers and straighteners available at home. It is not recommended to send home these electronics since the wattage is different in Belarus. The heating elements can overheat and be a fire hazard, and often they break easily there.

What do they wear?

Typically the children arrive for their six-week stay with a backpack and a small gym bag. One of the bags may contain gifts for the host family. The children bring very few clothes and many are not suitable for our summer weather. The summers in Belarus are typically shorter than ours, and much less humid. Please do your best to provide for the needs of your child, but this does not mean that you need to spend a fortune on things for them. Keep in mind that the child will have strict size and weight limits with the luggage for the returning flight.

It might be hard to convince the older boys to wear shorts. In Belarus only younger boys wear shorts. A couple of days in 90-degree weather will help persuade them to our style. Boys wear European style swimsuits and our style swimsuits seem strange to them. Some will adapt, some may not. Remember the chaperone is only a phone call away, if you need some help.

The children find our buildings and vehicles cold due to the air conditioning. You might want to keep a jacket or sweater in the car when running errands. It is not unusual to see the children dress in long pants and sleeves on 90 degree days. Once they get acclimated to the temperature the situation improves. Please provide guidance to the children in the morning, by informing them of the high temperature in Celsius or at least if it will be very hot, hot, or a cool day.

We advise you not to spend a lot of money on clothing for the child. Summer clothes will be useful in Belarus, both in the summer and winter season. In many cases, due to the form of heating, and the lack of temperature regulation in the winter, their houses may be very warm. The children typically wear summer like clothing around the house in the winter because of this. Goodwill and garage sales are good places to look for both winter and summer clothing for your child. Some groups will also have clothes closets where you can come and get clothing. Asking friends and family for clothes their children have outgrown is also a great way to get clothing! A great investment is a winter coat for the child.

A good pair of sneakers would be something you may want to invest in. They love these and can wear them for most of the year in Belarus. Please stay away from designer brands though as in many cases the Belarussian parents will sell the shoes when the child returns home. Reach out to local shops, some have humanitarian programs where they will give the children sneakers for free.

Shopping

Going shopping here is a new experience for the children. They are quickly overwhelmed by the number and size of our stores, the amount of merchandise, and the selection. It is best and cheaper to begin at consignment stores. Like here, fashion styles in Belarus are more provocative than Christians are comfortable with. Very tight and sensual clothing is common in Belarus and Eastern Europe. That does not mean you need to purchase those items for your child! Use this as an opportunity to train them in modesty. Older children try to convince hosts that their mother's let them wear certain styles. That may not be the case. Do not buy anything you feel is inappropriate.

School Supplies

Do not feel obligated to purchase school items! Should you choose to, purchasing a few items can be a huge help to families as they are expensive in Belarus. However, since notebooks and other items are heavy, sending some money for these items may be a good compromise.

Many children need some sort of school bag, a couple of composition or small spiral notebooks (5x7 size), a folder or two, pencils, pencil bag, glue, erasers, and an insulated lunch container is nice.

Younger children may need crayons or markers.

Older children may also need: ink pens (check to see if it is black or blue), small stapler, compass and angle measure, graph paper, and/or a simple calculator.

Piercings

Children who wish to get any piercings must have permission from the parents or legal guardian in Belarus before allowing them to do it. Contact your coordinator who will assist you in getting permission.

Laundry

Belarussians do not typically have a lot of clothing, especially if your child is from the village. In the village, clothes are hand washed and line dried, even in the middle of winter. They do not have good stain fighting sprays like we do. Newer apartments do have washers, but not driers. Clothes are line dried on the patio or on radiators. It is best to purchase clothes that are easily washed and dried. Do not wash any clothes that the child brings with them with your own clothing. Their colors tend to bleed more than ours and you may find your clothes different colors than you left them!

Children typically wear clothing multiple times before washing it. Explain to children that soap is not limited here and that we wash our clothes more often.

Some children become enamored with their new wardrobes and fashion. Do not be surprised if some children begin to change their clothes multiple times a day. For girls, a box of dress-up clothing can help minimize the amount of clean clothes in the laundry. Other children may have trouble matching their clothes. Older children can discreetly help.

Many of the children are unfamiliar with folding their laundry and placing them neatly in their drawers. Typically in Belarus, mothers or older siblings fold, and put away the clean clothes for the children. Feel free to train children to fold and care properly for their new clothes, especially if you expect this of your own children.

Food and Mealtimes

Belarussian food is very different and most Americans don't seem to care for it. Even the tastiest foods are so lightly seasoned that they taste almost bland. The children

often cannot handle our spicy food. It is recommended that you lightly season their food, especially for the first few days.

Please be cautious: Peanuts and peanut butter are not available in Belarus. Please watch the child for reactions to nuts. If there are other allergies, you will be notified before the arrival of the children.

Common Foods

The Belarussian diet includes many potatoes, cooked in a variety of ways. Their diet also includes many pickled items--and plenty of fried, greasy, fatty food. Belarussians are not used to our salads, and raw vegetables are only common on their mayonnaise based "salads". They also have little access to fruits. Fruit and fruit juices are rare treats for the children and many will try to make up for years of shortages at one sitting.

Sometimes children will make themselves sick by overeating these fruits, so watch them carefully the first few times. Let them know that there will be more where what they have came from!

Belarussians eat a lot of raw salami and smoked sausages. Fresh bakery bread is more familiar than our soft sandwich breads. Their sandwich breads tend to be smaller and more dense. Pasta is over cooked and served with butter on top. Some children do not like the flavor and texture of Velveeta and American sliced cheese, while others love it. Spaghetti with tomato sauce is loved by some and disliked by others. Encourage your child to just take a bite to help them figure out what they like and don't like.

Pork and fish is the most common meat. Chicken is also widely available, but is more expensive than pork and fish. Vegetables tend to be mostly the root varieties or cabbage. Cucumbers are also very common.

Beverages

The children are typically not used to drinking milk. At home, they are warned that dairy products are high in radioactivity, which ends up in the bones of those that consume them. Encourage the children to drink milk, but be gentle with them. Their milk is similar to flavored buttermilk. Children from villages may drink milk fresh from a goat.

Tea or coffee is served as the default beverage at every meal or snack.

Alcohol is plentiful in Belarus. The rate of Alcoholism in some regions of Belarus is around 90% or higher. Children could have unhealthy views or habits. They may request a drink or taste, as laws are different in Europe. Please do not serve alcohol to underage children.

Typically water in Belarus is carbonated. It may be unfamiliar to the children to drink water from the tap. Even though it is ok for us, the way our tap water is purified is different than there and what is in it can upset the children's' stomachs. Please provide bottled water to the children to drink. Tap water is fine for brushing teeth though.

Sweets

Cakes in Belarus tend to be more like our sponge cakes. Our cakes are much softer, moist and sweeter than theirs. Chocolate is affordable and easily available to children. Hard fruity candies are also available.

Chewing Gum is very expensive and does not have much flavor. Children love our gum and will go through a pack in one day. They tend to throw away a piece of gum once the flavor disappears. They do not always know not to swallow the gum. Make sure you show them where to dispose of their gum, otherwise you may find it stuck to furniture or other hidden places.

Picky Eaters

Like American children, some Belarussians can be picky eaters. Here are some suggestions: try ketchup on everything (they universally love it). Also, let the older children help cook some Belarussian meals. This will help them feel like you want to

know about their culture as much as you want to share your culture with them. Host families also have success by inviting the chaperone to join their family at a buffet. The chaperone will explain what foods are similar to what they eat at home and encourage them to try new foods. One host had success cooking some foods separately without seasonings and sauces, while preparing a seasoned version for her family.

Table manners

Table manners are different. Food is generally not passed, you reach for it. Their tables are much smaller than ours. Some of the children have wonderful manners, others don't. Have an interpreter explain which behaviors are not acceptable in your household and why. Always encourage your child to meet the same expectations regarding table manners that you expect of your own child. Many families have found it really helpful to invite the chaperone over for a meal early during the 6 weeks to help with this process.

Dishwashers usually not available in Belarus, although in some apartments they are becoming more common. Even if they do have one, it is usually significantly smaller than ours. Some mothers have children help wash dishes by hand. Feel free to train the children to help with clearing and setting the table, as well as with the dishes.

Understanding Your Child

Do I have to know how to speak Russian?

No, you do not have to know how to speak Russian. Some of the children study English at school and know some basic English words and phrases. If you learn a few basic Russian words and phrases you will be able to communicate smoothly. Remember the chaperone will be available to you by phone anytime. A phrase list is also available on www.abro.org under the "forms" section. This list has helpful words and phrases and you could copy some of these cut them out and place them in convenient locations such as the kitchen, bathroom, or the refrigerator as helpful references. The full list can also be kept in a central location so that the child can get it to use in the event they need to tell you something.

You can find a good selection of Russian books and tapes at Amazon.com. There are also wonderful apps for your smart phone that can assist with translation. A great one is Google Translate. Also, a good Russian/English dictionary is extremely helpful. Some families make their own picture/word cards on index cards. The child can write the Russian word below the English. It is a good way for the host family to learn a bit of Russian.

Children in the larger cities do take minimal English (British version) in school. Many kids don't take the class seriously unless they want to come here. They understand the language better than they can speak it. In the village regions, it may not be taught at all. Having a white or chalkboard is handy, simple drawings can be made to help with communication. Hand gestures and simple words may be enough in many cases. Encourage the child to point to the English words in a dictionary if they can't pronounce them. Be creative with your expressions and gestures and hopefully the children will do likewise. Keep a sense of humor and try not to get frustrated. Laughter can be a form of communication. And know, that in any situation the chaperone is just a phone call away.

Transportation

Many Belarussian families do not own cars. They either walk or take public trolleys/buses when they need to get around. The capital city, Minsk does have a subway system, but most of the children have not been to Minsk and would not have had the opportunity to use it.

Roads in Belarus are narrow and rougher than ours. Some children can experience some level of motion sickness during the flight over and/or in our cars. Keep a plastic bag or container in the car the first few times or on a long trip until you are certain how the child will respond. Dramamine is a good option to help with this, but it tends to make the children extremely sleepy for extended periods. Half a tablet usually is enough.

Safety Concerns

Many states have safety laws that the children are unfamiliar with. Please teach and assist the child with seat belts. The youngest children may be tiny and may need booster seats in a car. Please check weight soon after arrival to see if child needs a booster/car seat. Also, sitting in the front seat will present a problem due to airbags. Have the chaperone explain if they child is upset about sitting in the back, especially if you have older teens who sit up front. Seatbelts are not required for older teens and adults in the back seats in Belarus.

Please be especially careful in parking lots and streets! Teach them to be careful when opening car doors without hitting other cars. Hold their hands until they learn to watch for cars. Children from cities tend to be better, but are often too distracted the first few weeks to remember these simple safety items.

Many children know how to ride a two-wheel bike, but not all. In Belarus, children do not wear bicycle helmets, and tend to rebel with wearing them. Please be firm with them and ensure they wear the proper protection with all activities.

Travel

Host families are able to take their ABRO child with them on vacation. If for some reason you prefer not to, some groups have relief families available. Other host families may also be willing to keep your child while you are gone. Host families should speak to their group coordinator about how the coordinator wants to be notified of travel. There is a host family travel notification form online that some groups may choose to use.

A trip to the ocean is a once in a lifetime opportunity for the children. Belarus is land locked and most children will never have a chance to see the ocean. A day at an amusement park is popular and many children enjoy the rides.

You should not take your Belarussian child out of country. Their visa only permits a onetime entry into the USA. If they leave the country, they may not be allowed to reenter and will be stranded in another country. Vacations should be planned so that

there are not even layovers in a foreign country. This includes the Caribbean. Cruises are not recommended because many ports of call are outside of the US.

Contacting Family

Please keep in mind the time change! They are 7 hours ahead during daylight savings time and 8 hours ahead in the winter.

ABRO and the Ark House in Belarus will notify the parents or guardians in Belarus of the children's safe arrival. It is recommended that you assist your child in making a call to their home the first week. It will be reassuring to the parent and child to hear each other's voice and to know all is well. Additional calls are at your discretion. We typically recommend no more than 1 time per week, but some groups recommend less. It all depends on how the child is adjusting and how calling home affects them. Your chaperone can help explain the situation to the parents.

Using the Phone

Some children will have siblings in other ABRO groups. Some parents will provide host names or numbers and talking with their siblings can help with homesickness. Children who travel together may wish to develop friendships with each other. Children who come year after year may also want to cultivate friendships with Americans. It is important to set limits on how often they use the phone. If they call home or their siblings too often it can affect how they bond with you as their host family.

The logistics

A sample number:

011-375-xxx-00-00-00

The first three digits is the international code.

The next three digits is the country code for Belarus.

The next three numbers is the area or regional code.

The last six digits are is local telephone number.

You can dial this number directly through your long distance carrier. However, this is the most expensive way to call. More cost effective plans are available through your cell

phone carrier. Verizon, for example, offers two international calling plans, one for \$5 a month with calls being .38 a minute or a \$20 a month plan with 1000 minutes that have no per minute cost. These plans can be turned on for the summer and then turned back off when the kids return home.

Another great option is Skype. You can call landlines and cell phones in Belarus for a low per minute cost. Computers are becoming more and more common in Belarus and if your child's family has Skype then you can call computer to computer for free. Video chats are also an option if the child's family has a good internet connection. Viber is a cell phone app that is widely used in Belarus. It allows you to call and text to other Viber users over WiFi or your data at no other cost.

Some hosts have tried to use international phone cards with mixed results. If it doesn't work, you are out some money.

Connecting with your child's parent on Facebook is a great way for their family to keep up to date about what their child is doing without having to actually talk with them.

Mail

Children can mail letters, pictures, or postcards home. Ideally, addresses should be written in Russian. Feel free to contact the ABRO office in the US or in Belarus for assistance with this. The chaperone or group coordinator can also assist if necessary. The post office will need to calculate the weight. We do not recommend you mail money. If you choose to do so, make it small amounts that, if confiscated, it wouldn't be a huge deal. Reach out to the ABRO office if you want to send larger amounts of money and we can make suggestions on how to do it safely.

Internet

Some families in the larger cities have dial-up internet access or smart phone data service. If your child's family has internet access, the child can exchange emails with their family. You can switch your computer or laptop language settings to Russian. See group coordinator if you need assistance in adjusting your computer.

Important messages can be sent through our office in Belarus, they will contact the family by phone and email a reply. Talk to your group coordinator for assistance.

Behavioral Problems

The first thing to keep in mind is that these children are from a very different culture. Children tend to rebel against some of our rules because in Belarus children are allowed much more freedom. Stranger danger and kidnapping are not as much of an issue as they are in the US and therefore children don't understand why we are so protective. Boys in Belarus are often more aggressive than boys in the United States. This is an attribute that is necessary in Belarus and can be difficult for the host family to adjust to. Set limitations and expectations the first week. Don't let bad behavior slide, as it will continue. You are less likely to be challenged on an issue if you have been consistent from the start and have not spoiled the child with special privileges at the beginning of the visit, which can set the tone for future expectations. Some children (like our own) are very timid and may never challenge your authority. Others may become very stubborn. Bringing the chaperone over during the first week can help you establish the rules with the child and give the child the opportunity to ask questions if they have any.

Be prepared for sibling rivalry. Prepare your own children for the child's arrival and let them know that their visitor will take up more of your time.

It is helpful to remember that children use two main tools to communicate - language and behavior. Since they often do not speak English, their ability to communicate with you through language has been reduced. Expect the behavioral expressions of feelings, wants and needs to increase. Being aware of this simple fact can often help us to adjust our own expectations of the child. Sometimes, with this in mind, behavior might not be confused with a "behavioral problem." In some cases, unwanted behavior may be simply a cultural difference or a cultural misunderstanding. It is important to address issues early because many issues can be solved with some discussion.

Please do not wait to communicate issues with your chaperone or group coordinator. We want this experience to be as meaningful and good for your family as it is for the child. Talking about issues early on can make the rest of the summer much better. Please don't wait to unload about problems until you get to the airport for departure!

Homesickness

You can expect that your child may become homesick at some point. Interaction with other ABRO children may help, and the chaperone can be of assistance. But the most important thing is to always show the child that you love them. If it is severe, contacting the child's family may help. As we mentioned above, please limit interaction with their family so that the child can bond with yours, but allowing them to speak to family a few times during the 6 weeks is important for them and for their parents back home.

Chores and Work

We want you to include your Belarussian child in the daily chores around the house. If you expect your own children to clear the plates after dinner or make up the bed, etc., then please expect this if your Belarussian child as well. However, please be sensitive that we do want to give children, especially older children, an opportunity to relax while here. In Belarus, the oldest daughter often acts like a surrogate mother and is expected to care for the house and younger children while parents are at work.

In Belarus, children do not tend to get allowance money. It is up to you to decide if they want to give your child an allowance and/or extra money for special jobs. It does help the children to appreciate the value of money and money management. Some hosts take the children shopping the last week to purchase something with the saved money. Other children like to take the money home to add to any money they might have at home. Some Belarussian families find it remarkable how motivated children become when they start giving slight allowances after a child returns from the US.

Please keep in mind that while household chores and yard work is acceptable, as is assisting you with projects, children are not permitted to work on any type of job while in

the US. They are not here to work a paid job and they do not have the proper government papers to work here legally.

Childcare

Never leave the Belarussian child alone, regardless of age. Never leave the Belarussian child alone to care for other children regardless of age. This is a requirement from Belarus government as well as the ABRO program. Please consult your coordinator if you plan to use any sort of childcare while the child is here (other than family or other host families). Belarussian children should never be left in the care of anyone under the age of 16. Please consult your coordinator if the child will be care for during the day or long periods of time by someone other than the host parents.

Religion

Churches in Belarus are required to be registered with the government for monitoring. Some smaller churches operate under the radar but could face penalties if caught.

Churches and Worship

The Russian Orthodox church is what most Belarussians associate with. Travelers can pass by many expensive cathedrals filled with glittering gold filigree and beautiful hand painted murals. There is no seating inside the building. Worship consists of a choir chanting and people bowing every few minutes. During the service, doors will open from a fancy inner room. A priest will come out in opulent vestments into the outer sanctuary. He walks along the edges of the room blessing the crowd making gestures with his hands. People turn to face him as he walks. He then goes back inside the inner room. The chanting and bowing continues. The whole experience was depressing. The church is dead, neglecting to teach and minister to the people.

The people of Belarus do baptize their babies and some send young children to a Christian education class. Children tend to have knowledge of the major Bible stories;

yet do not understand basic Biblical doctrine. The Russian Orthodox church does not believe in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Bibles

The options for Bibles in Russian are fairly limited. Bibles can be sent home with children if desired.

1. The most common version you will see is the synod version (translated in 1870's) that is worse than reading King James version and the OT books are in a different order. I do not recommend purchasing this version

2. The best Bible, in my opinion, for young children (12-13 and under) is <http://bookstore.sga.org/70-faith-to-grow-on-bible-for-children.html> It is a great introduction to Bible study. It is a full-text Bible that is combined with words of wisdom from well-known and trusted Bible teacher John MacArthur.

3. There is a modern translation of the New Testament and Psalms that is a dual language (English/Russian) Bible. It is good for pointing out specific NT verses for the kids to read. This is an especially good option for older children whose English is better. They enjoy comparing the verse in English to the same verse in Russian <http://bookstore.sga.org/30-new-testament-and-psalms-russian-english.html>

4. Favorite Bible stories for young teens: <https://russianbiblesociety.com/shop/for-children/childrens-bible-bible-storybook-for-teens-w-color-illustrations-hb/>

5. There is a new modern Russian translation that is a complete Bible. It is available in several locations. http://www.amazon.com/Russian-Bible-Translation-Hardcover-Perevod/dp/9171652213/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1368496998&sr=1-1&keywords=russian+bibles or <https://www.walmart.com/ip/The-Holy-Bible-The-New-Russian-Translation/44877659?wmlspartner=wlp&selectedSellerId=2078&adid=2222222227034715719&wl0=&wl1=g&wl2=c&wl3=95058667488&wl4=pla->

131283753888&wl5=9009566&wl6=&wl7=&wl8=&wl9=pla&wl10=113537499&wl11=online&wl12=44877659&wl13=&veh=sem

Tips for at home activities

As has been mentioned before, we recommend you try to have the chaperone visit with the new families within the first week of their arrival to ensure that the child's visit is proceeding smoothly.

In the past the children's favorite activity has been swimming. The opportunities to swim in Belarus are limited, and the exercise in the fresh air and sunshine provides excellent health benefits. One of the first projects may be to locate a swimsuit. Using a good sunscreen is imperative. Most of the children are fair skinned and Belarus is very far north with weaker sunrays.

Other activities they like are soccer (called "football" in Russian), bike riding, checkers, chess, UNO, and other games. Walt Disney movies are very entertaining to the kids despite the language barrier.

What is expected of the host family?

Role of the Host Family

The most important role of the host family is to provide the visiting Belarussian child with day-to-day care in a loving and stable environment. Remember the children are coming to have a respite from the radiation. They are in need of wholesome food; fresh clean air and the love that will make them feel at home in a foreign country that is so different from their own.

It is important to treat the child like one of your own. If you don't allow your children to do a particular thing or own something, don't let your ABRO child. This will help minimize jealousy issues with your own children. The child may try to convince you their guardian at home permits it. Just remember it is your home, they are a guest.

Please report any concerns or serious problems to the coordinator as soon as possible. It is quicker to resolve issues in the early stages rather than when things get unbearable or after a child leaves.

Love and security, there is nothing more important than a family who can provide the combination of these two items. Your time with these children will bring them to a time where they will trust and depend on you. Their time with you will change them for the rest of their lives with better health and the exposure to a different culture. They will see Jesus reflected in each and every one of you. It is a great adventure and an awesome responsibility.

Gifts

Your child will likely arrive bearing gifts for you and your family. You might want to be prepared at the airport with flowers, balloons, and/or a stuffed animal. This will help them feel more welcomed. You might also want to have a gift bag waiting for them at home with items such as:

- Toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste
- Hairbrush, comb, and shampoo
- Vitamins
- Baseball caps
- Hair bows or ties
- Crayons or markers
- Stationary, postcards
- Disposable camera
- Stuffed animals
- Barbie dolls or Matchbox cars
- Small photo album
- Sunglasses

Care Bags

In America we take many things for granted, including the availability of our over the counter medications. The Belarussian children and their families do not have easy

access to medications. If you are able to, you can help by sending your child home with a care bag filled with some of the following items.

- Acetaminophen (children and adult)
- Fluoride toothpaste and fluoride rinses
- Adhesive bandages
- Multi-vitamins (children and adult)
- Antibiotic ointments and lotions
- Antidiarrheal medications

Thank You Notes

Your coordinator will try to provide any businesses, medical providers, and other special people a thank you note and a photograph of the child or group.

When you go to medical appointments or activities, please take photos. They are a great way to document your summer for your child's family and the ABRO office also loves to see them!

Tips for travel home

Each child will probably need a suitcase to pack for the trip home, since they typically do not come with one. You should probably keep a lookout for a cheap suitcase or duffel bag. The weight limit for the bag in the past has been 50 pounds, but remember some of the children will have to carry these bags themselves.

Keeping photos of their trip serves as a visual journal of all the fun they had while they were here, and it is an excellent gift for the children.

Some of the children come with a wish list of things that are needed by their families so be on the lookout.

More details will be provided about the return home closer to the end of the summer.

Final Thoughts

These children return home with many impressions of America. They are surprised at how clean everything is and how we cut our grass. After returning home some children have asked their parents to keep their voices down when disciplining. They notice that many American parents do not shout, but use soft voices when disciplining. Keep in mind these children are watching all the time and we by example, can help create attitude changes in Belarus.

Remember these children are from another culture with their own value system. It's easy to try and impose our values on them, but we cannot expect them to mold to our ways because we think it is the best. We can learn from them also, be observant and watch responses.

The families of these children are deeply grateful for people thousands of miles away that love these children as their own. They thank the American visitors profusely. They do notice how healthy the children are when they return. Some parents notice a change in behaviors or manners. Children who age out of the program are filled with gratitude and memories of their time here. Many children notice our faith and some come to know God as their Lord and Savior.

Now that we've got you totally fearful, let me assure you, none of these things are a big deal. We just feel that the more you know, the more successful you will be. Know that the ABRO office in Belarus and in the US, your chaperone, your coordinator and other host families are here to help you through anything!

You can do it!!

And it's going to be GREAT!



Thank you to Betsy Lalley for her assistance with putting together this document!