



# A Report on Systems to Protect Children from Abuse in Latvia

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**About the Kids First Fund:** *The Kids First Fund helps abused and abandoned children. We protect children from abuse. We empower young adults with a positive future. We strengthen families. We build awareness of child abuse. We operate in countries where resources are very limited. Current projects provide support for children in the Democratic Republic of Latvia located on the Baltic Sea. The Kids First Fund supports programs to educate child welfare professionals such as police officers, judges, social workers and prosecutors on child abuse issues. Direct assistance is also given to centers providing care for abused children. The Kids First Fund is a very efficient non-profit organization and does not incur any expenses since all staffing and services are donated. Learn more at [www.KidsFirstFund.org](http://www.KidsFirstFund.org).*

# A Report on Systems to Protect Children from Abuse in Latvia

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to provide the Kids First Fund, Inc. and other funding agencies with background information regarding child abuse issues in the Republic of Latvia. The Kids First Fund is a U.S.-based non-profit organization, registered with the U.S. Internal Revenue Service. This report is intended to help the board of the Kids First Fund develop a grant-making strategy for investing resources in a manner consistent with the organization's mission of helping abused, neglected and abandoned children in resource-limited areas of the world.

The need for fact-finding work was initially discussed among an ad-hoc group of board members and speakers during a series of lectures presented throughout Latvia in May 2003. The Kids First Fund sponsored the seminar series, which was called "U.S. Laws Which Protect Women and Children from Abuse." The seminar speakers consisted of four child welfare professionals from the U.S. State of Wisconsin and included Judge Michael Dwyer who is a co-author of this report. He subsequently joined the Kids First Fund during 2003 as a board member. The speakers interacted with Jay Sorensen, president of the Kids First Fund, and various Latvia-based board members. Dialogue with seminar participants involved in child abuse issues created an opportunity for in-depth discussion among the speakers during travel between seminar locations.

During the seminars a discussion among participants defined the depth of the challenge in Latvia. Police officers were debating the wisdom of intervening during a domestic violence incident. Central to the debate was the reluctance of the police to cause damage to a door in order to prevent serious injury to a victim of domestic violence. This incident illustrates that Latvian views of private property and the rights of victims are different from those in Wisconsin. As a result, the authors of this report realized a greater effort would be required to understand the situation in Latvia.

The debate between the police officers demonstrated the need for the Kids First Fund to have a better understanding of the legal, political, economic and social conditions in Latvia. Subsequent to the seminar series, the primary recipient of Kids First Fund funds in Latvia was experiencing significant changes. The Bulduri Family Care Centre in Jurmala underwent a change in mission; its new purpose did not include critical care for abused children.

Board members Michael Dwyer and Jay Sorensen volunteered to lead a research project on the issue of child abuse in Latvia with the outcome being a strategy proposal to present to the board of directors. Michael Dwyer led the effort to establish contact and schedule interviews with stakeholders in Latvia's child protection community. Latvia-based board member Irma Kalnina provided assistance in this effort.

Starting with the list of contacts generated during the May 2003 seminar series, Michael Dwyer solicited interest among professionals in Latvia's government and NGO sectors. In Europe, charities are commonly referred to as NGOs or non-governmental organizations. The results were extremely favorable, with 14 separate meetings scheduled in Riga and three areas outside of the capitol in Ventspils, Mersrags and Kemerī. The complete listing of interview participants is included as an appendix to this report.

The authors of this report wish to acknowledge the wonderful assistance of Irma Kalnina and the interview participants for being very generous with their time and experience. The Kids First Fund also appreciates the support of Steve Diggelman of Swiss International Air Lines, Guenther Sollinger of Air Baltic, Dan Ouellette of the Clarion Barcello Hotel in Chicago and board members Arturs Irbe and Stuart Benzal for in-kind support of

travel expenses associated with the trip. Consistent with Kids First Fund practice, the entire trip, research process and report creation was accomplished without the use of donor funds.

A word about methodology is important. This was not a formal or scholarly research project. The authors acknowledge the lack of credentials to undertake such a task. Rather, this was a common sense, interpersonal attempt to learn about conditions facing abused children — and very often their mothers — in Latvia.

Michael Dwyer began the process by gathering all of the relevant information available in English on the topic. Much of the collateral and information was provided by the interview participants prior to the meetings in Latvia. The interviews occurred in Latvia January 17-21, 2004 in the cities listed above.

The majority of the meetings occurred in the NGO Centre in Riga with additional visits made to locations in Riga, Ventspils, Mersrags and Kemerī. For example, site visits were made to the Mersrags Crisis Center, Day Centre for Children in Ventspils, Center for Pregnant Teens in Kemerī, Dardezde Children's Center and the Riga City Orphan's Court. Thus, the bulk of the information contained in this report is anecdotal, not scientific. Because it comes from those who work in this area every day, the authors are confident it is largely reliable.

## **Cultural and Historical Background**

The era of the Soviet occupation exerts an extremely significant influence on virtually every aspect of life in Latvia today. The Soviet occupation began in 1940 and ended with independence in 1991. As Americans, describing the impact of the Soviet occupation on the lives of Latvians is a very difficult — if not impossible — task. No doubt academics are devoting entire careers to examining and understanding what appears to have been a profoundly dysfunctional era. As persons who have not personally experienced the occupation, the authors cannot fully understand it. With these qualifying remarks in mind, some general themes were present in virtually all of the interviews.

The most fundamental, and most difficult premise to comprehend, is the absolute and complete denial of the existence of social problems within the Soviet Union. By its own definition, the Soviet Union was a worker's paradise... a system in which the government effectively served the needs of all citizens. This propaganda-based definition denied the existence of social problems including child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, and drug and alcohol abuse. These problems were associated with western decadence; their absence in the Soviet Union was seen as an indication of the superiority of the Soviet system.

As is the human condition within any political, economic or cultural structure, these problems certainly existed. It is probable they existed in abundance due to the lack of police, judicial and societal oversight. Systems did exist which eventually became engaged in the process of addressing violence. These systems were large institutions such as prisons and mental institutions whose approach was mainly punitive.

The authors identified two significant consequences of the historic condition of denial. First, society as a whole does not fully understand or acknowledge the breadth and depth of today's social problems. This is also true in the United States. However, the degree of acceptance is far higher in the United States and other societies, which have developed laws, systems and support communities associated with the plight of abused children. The second consequence relates to the professional field of child protection — this field of social work did not exist in Latvia prior to 1991. Social work was born in the post-Soviet era.

Another legacy of the Soviet era is the absence of a foster care system in which a family unit is seen as preferable for the care of children. The authors found the role of parents and children to often be at conflict within Soviet

philosophy. Upon reflection, this may hardly seem surprising, as so much of the era was culturally dysfunctional. For example, children's literature during Stalin's time celebrated a child named Pavel Morozov who became a state hero after he reported his parents to the police for political crimes against the state. The Soviet system did not appear to hesitate to place children in the care of orphanages. Perhaps state-supported care was deemed less of a risk because it could systematically indoctrinate children into the socialist system.

It became clear from the interviews that Soviet ideology encouraged placement of children in large government-operated orphanages when parents were deemed unable to raise their own children. This was the only available option. Thus, with no historic experience, there is no cultural basis for foster care in Latvia. The authors also believe the Soviet experience largely inhibits the ability and desire of most individuals in Latvian society to be altruistic and charitable to strangers — virtues which motivate most foster parents. Exceptions always exist in any society and the authors believe altruism, philanthropy and concern for the unfortunate will gradually increase based on economic improvements and a return to the civil society which existed in Latvia before the Soviet occupation.

This leads to the final important legacy of the Soviet era — strongly entrenched poverty and a low standard of living. Latvia has made impressive economic progress in a very short time. However, unemployment, low wages and a shortage of low-income housing can be attributed to Latvia's exit from a planned economy to a free-market system. The severity of these conditions greatly increases as one travels to rural areas away from the capitol of Riga with the most acute conditions present in Latvia's eastern region of Latgale.

As this report makes clear, the economic situation in Latvia presents a major obstacle to improving the lives of children. External resources, such as those represented by the Kids First Fund, can play a significant role in improving the lives of abused children. Internal influences — such as Latvia's government — will have a far greater impact on children in Latvia. The following portion of the report describes government systems that can be very similar, or sometimes very distinct, from the framework used in the United States.

## **Legal and Social Framework**

Latvia is a parliamentary democracy generally following the British model. The parliament, called the Saeima, consists of 100 delegates. The political parties maneuver to select a prime minister who has principal responsibility for the operations of government. Shortly after the time when the interviews occurred, the prime minister and his government failed to maintain majority support and he was forced to resign. Ministers or Secretaries are selected for each of the cabinet ministries to fill the role of the executive branch. The Constitution includes a president selected by Parliament who has a somewhat symbolic role with responsibilities focused on the Latvia's relations abroad.

The laws tend to be generally phrased, leaving the detail to be worked out by the executive branch of government. With a few exceptions, the laws appear to adequately address major issues related to abuse. However, by U.S. standards, some significant gaps exist in the protection of women and children.

For example, the law appears to be largely silent on the issue of child neglect, though a new law is pending approval. Laws exist regulating abuse, but don't provide special emphasis for the issue of domestic violence — which appears to have a lower legal and political priority than child abuse. Portions of society seem to accept spousal abuse as a normal condition. The lack of enforcement of laws by the police and judicial system may create even greater challenges for victims of abuse. On more than one occasion, the interviews revealed a serious lack of protection for women from abuse.

Laws exist which identify and prohibit various types of physical abuse from mild to severe. However, special legal attention is not given to the abuse of women. Police will intervene during incidents but they lack training in the process of interviewing female victims and have not developed an appreciation for the dynamics that occur between a male abuser and the female victim.

For example, the abuser and victim are routinely not separated during the interview. This typically results in coercion by the abuser in which the victim refuses to issue a formal complaint. In cases where the victim actually files a complaint, the police don't take action to prevent a reoccurrence after the abuser leaves police custody. Abused women are not provided assistance during the entire process and must find their own solutions for temporary shelter and assistance. The country is without overnight shelter facilities for women with one exception being a small shelter for mothers and infants.

In other words, a husband can pummel his wife and then in the presence of the police, successfully coerce her not to press charges. Pity the poor woman who actually files a complaint only to face the wrath of her husband after the police releases him. It is chilling to think of the amount of suffering endured by children and their mothers behind the closed doors of private homes.

As was described in the introduction of this report, Michael Dwyer and Jay Sorensen heard first-hand discussion of these issues among a group of police officers during the May 2003 seminar series. The higher value placed on the protection of private property versus protecting a woman from injury is not merely a police problem. It is truly a societal problem that has resulted from a convergence of negative cultural, economic and political factors. The same conditions were widespread in the United States within recent history and only through the efforts of the women's movement, civil lawsuits, legislative action and popular sentiment has change occurred. Awareness of these issues seems greatest in Riga where training of police for domestic abuse incidents is only now beginning to occur.

The administration of the laws is accomplished through two systems; national and local. This relationship is very similar to that which exists between federal and state governments in the United States. In Latvia, the local unit of government is the municipality (in rural areas it is sometimes referred to as a parish). Most of the work related to child welfare is the responsibility of municipal governments. Each municipal government is required by law to operate a dedicated agency to provide social services. Each must also operate a court to address children's issues, which awkwardly translates as "orphan's court."

The sophistication of social services was reported to vary widely throughout Latvia. Urban areas, such as Riga, have systems that receive significant financial support and have professionally trained staff. Rural areas appear to suffer from a lack of financial resources to deliver the services they are required to provide. Rural areas are unable to attract professionals such as judges and social workers with advanced educations.

The national government provides limited financial resources for the care and protection of children. The Welfare Ministry has financial responsibility for the care of children in orphanages under the age of two. The current budget provides 280,000 Latvian Lats per year (approximately US\$320,000) for the treatment of abused children. The Welfare Ministry provides funding for four residential crisis centers throughout Latvia for abused children. All other services, such as care for older children and the investigation of child abuse, are the responsibility of the municipal governments. The national government maintains little regulatory control over child abuse issues in the municipalities.

Poverty is a significant problem in Latvia for the government and individuals. As with many problems, the issues are far more acute in rural areas where employment and industry are scarce. There is a tendency for resources and people to gravitate toward the capitol city of Riga. In many respects, Riga is a beautiful, vibrant and sophisticated city

and appears to have sufficient expertise and resources to address child abuse issues. The same was not observed for smaller cities and rural areas, which lack finances and expertise. The U.S. problem of unfunded mandates — in which national legislation requires social services but offers no financial support — also exists in Latvia.

At the time of the interviews, the government was attempting to reduce and consolidate the municipal government from 540 units to approximately 120. Similar to the United States, the need exists to make government more efficient and responsive. It is believed this can be accomplished by creating a system in which geographic units are larger and resources are consolidated to provide higher quality services.

Presently, very small villages carry the same burden of legislative mandates as the larger municipal government of Riga. As it would be in Wisconsin, this process of consolidation will doubtless be a very political process for which the outcome is unknown.

As described in the following section, the delivery of social services varies throughout Latvia with the greatest difficulties faced in the resource-poor rural areas of the country. Latvia's laws address the issue of child abuse on a national scale, but enforcement and assistance largely remain the responsibility of local governments, where the quality of services may vary greatly.

## THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

### **Reporting and Investigation of Abuse**

Latvia does not have a mandatory reporting law in which child-related professions such as doctors and teachers are required by law to report suspected cases of child abuse. There appears to be considerable variation in the nature and extent of reporting. Reporting by elementary school teachers appears to be inconsistent and lacks a formal training process. It appears reporting in rural areas is far more rare than in larger cities such as Riga. Conditions seem similar to that experienced in the United States during the early 1980s. The monitoring and reporting of child abuse by professionals represents a new and somewhat controversial expectation for Latvian society.

Many personal and cultural factors impede the process of professionals and strangers reporting child abuse to the police. Many of Latvia's residents, along with those in other former Soviet republics, have the additional factor of a dreaded fear of police involvement. Traditionally, all contact with the police was avoided. The police represented the tyranny of the state and were largely seen as a corrupt institution. Reporting any behavior, including violence against women and children, was seen as a very powerful tool of repression. These old habits are slowly changing. The reputation of the police is slowly improving through a process of reform that includes better training and officer selection. Still, if Latvia's experience mirrors that of the United States, it can be reliably predicted that abuse and neglect are seriously underreported.

The process for removing children from families was not fully clarified during the interviews. The child crisis centers found in a handful of locations appear to work cooperatively with orphan's courts and can intervene during emergencies. Afterwards, this intervention is reviewed by the orphan's court and affirmed or denied. Established procedures for emergency intervention, such as the detention of a child by the orphan's court, were not readily apparent. It appears a legislative mandated procedure for taking a child into protective custody is lacking.

Thus, the protection offered to a child in the city of Ventspils may vary substantially for a child residing in a rural area near Ludza. Unlike in the State of Wisconsin, where a court hearing must be held within 48 hours after a child is taken into custody, the process appears to be more informal and unstructured in Latvia.

## **Adjudication and the Courts**

Legal determinations regarding the status of children are made by the orphan's court. Unlike the system in the State of Wisconsin, the orphan's court acts as prosecutor and judge to determine abuse and neglect. Municipal governments, not the orphan's court, are responsible for providing the necessary services to rehabilitate the family. As was past practice in the State of Wisconsin (and remains the practice in some states) the orphan's court has lower jurisdiction than the district (trial) courts in Latvia. Judges in the orphan's court system are not required to have law degrees or be licensed as lawyers. In urban areas, such as Riga, it is common practice for orphan's court judges to be lawyers, while this appears to be a rare occurrence in rural areas.

The orphan's court has the authority to temporarily suspend parental authority for a maximum period of six months at a time. The writers of this report are not aware of any limitations placed on the number of rulings or the maximum time of removal. If the orphan's court concludes a parent is incapable of providing care, it may seek a termination of parental authority by petitioning the higher district court. Orphan's court personnel have responsibility for prosecuting the termination at the district court level. The interviews revealed termination is approved in approximately 50% of the cases filed in the Riga orphan's court recently.

Latvian law requires that a parent losing authority must continue to provide financial support for the child. In practice, this seldom happens, as poverty is likely to be a contributing factor in the case. It was unclear how financial support is actually realized after children have been removed from their homes.

## **Delivery of Social Services**

Municipal governments have primary responsibility to provide child abuse and neglect services and family rehabilitation. In a country of 2.3 million residents<sup>1</sup>, the national government provides financial support to four residential crisis centers each having approximately 20 beds. In addition, the national government allocates resources to provide rehabilitation services for 1,000 children each year. The label of crisis center often has broad application in Latvia and includes the above described shelters but also may include non-residential services such as NGOs providing after-school activities to at-risk teens.

Responses during the interviews provided clear indication that demand for services by abused children exceeds existing resources. However, the method of how access to these services is rationed was not clarified during the interviews. The national government purchases crisis center services through an annual process of competitive bidding. Through this funding mechanism, the government can exercise control over the type of programs offered.

Municipal governments are required by law to provide a Social Assistance Center with the purpose of assessing at-risk families and providing assistance to those in need. These governments, which currently number 540, are also required to offer social and psychological services upon referral by the orphan's court, police, families or individuals upon request. In a practical sense, without national funding, these services are not provided in many locations.

In recognition of this problem, the national government plans to supplement the existing four crisis centers with an additional four centers during 2004. On a shared-cost basis, the national government will fund 2/3 of the operating cost with the remaining 1/3 paid by the participating municipal government. The national government's contribution for each center will be 7,000 Latvian Lats, which is approximately US\$10,500. Support will be awarded using a competitive bidding process. Rather than gifting the money to municipal governments, the national government requires a good faith effort from the municipality through shared responsibility. It was

<sup>1</sup> Statistician's Estimates for 2003, Population Statistics Division, Government of Latvia, December 11, 2003

generally believed this process helps identify the most progressive and efficient municipal governments. These centers are also the least likely to close after national funding ceases at the end of the three-year period.

The stark reality for abused children outside of Riga is that few crisis centers or shelters are available. A few local governments offer centers providing non-emergency services such as after-school activities, hot meals and tutoring in addition to crisis intervention. But these are rare and none offer overnight accommodations for abused children. It is noteworthy that Latvia virtually lacks a shelter facility to accommodate abused women and their children. The exception is the Dardezde Children's Center in Riga, which provides shelter to a limited number of mothers and their infants.

The lack of institutional resources is compounded by the severe shortage of trained social workers. There are approximately 800 social workers in all of Latvia, representing a ratio of one worker per 2,875 residents. By comparison, 11,472 social workers serve Wisconsin's population of 5.4 million residents<sup>2</sup>; with a ratio of one worker per 470 residents<sup>3</sup>. In Latvia, the majority of social workers do not have formal training with only 10% having a degree. The most qualified work in Riga and earn approximately 200 Latvian Lats (US\$300) per month. Education levels and pay is lower in rural areas, with salaries as low as 80 Latvian Lats (US\$120) per month.

Economic, political and cultural factors create special hardships for abused and neglected children. Historical influence and society's denial of child abuse hinders attempts to address its source and treat its victims. Other cultural biases handicap the development of alternatives such as adoption or foster care. The entire system is severely stressed by the pervasive problem of poverty — which probably contributes to the incidence of abuse, places great demands upon the state treasury and lessens the likelihood of charitable behavior.

Improvement will continue to occur concurrent with changing attitudes on the topic of child abuse. Social workers are a critical part of the process. However, their impact is reduced by the lower status given to social workers as a profession. The national government realizes this issue and has decreed advanced educational requirements for all social workers with an implementation time frame of 2010 through 2012.

The Youth Health Center system of Latvia did present itself as a potential child abuse resource. As a part of larger health care system, this network operates as 12 independent centers throughout the country. These provide an array of services such as sex education, professional education of teachers on sexuality issues, medical and psychological services. Unfortunately, with few exceptions the centers do not seem to coordinate the delivery of services with the government's child welfare system.

Any system designed to protect children from abuse relies upon placing children in safe environments. The next section describes the options available within the social service and judicial systems.

## **Placement of Children**

There are basically three out-of-home placement alternatives for non-disabled children in Latvia: 1) orphanages, 2) guardianships and 3) boarding schools. Severely disabled children reside in three specialized childcare centers having a total capacity for 450 children. Orphanages fall into two categories; those for infants under the age of two and those for children age 2 through 18. Infant orphanages are called social care centers for orphans (SCCO) while facilities for older children are simply called orphanages.

During 2001 there were 672 children housed in SCCO institutions, funded entirely by the national government. There were 55 orphanages in operation during 2001 that cared for over 2,500 children. Despite the label, very

<sup>2</sup> State Quick Facts – 2001 Population Estimate, U.S. Bureau of the Census

<sup>3</sup> Wisconsin Department of Regulation and Licensing, Wisconsin licensed social workers as of February, 2004, based upon conversation with representative Ms. Cathy Pond, March 8, 2004

few of the residents are orphans in the literal sense — children who have no parents because of death or termination of parental authority. Most of the children are abandoned, abused or neglected and have at least one surviving parent. Municipal governments support the orphanages with many providing services for multiple municipalities. The average cost of care for one child is 200 Latvian Lats (US\$300) per month per child. A limited number of privately-supported orphanages are also operated by non-profit organizations.

Orphan's courts in Latvia placed 9,133 children under guardianship during 2001. The majority of guardians are relatives of the children such as aunts, uncles or grandparents. Guardians receive financial support from the national government of approximately 170 Latvian Lats (US\$255) per month.

About the same number of children were placed in boarding schools. Most were placed in boarding schools because their parents could not provide adequate support. Typically, these children live at the boarding school during the week and return home on weekends to live with parents or guardians. The boarding schools have a reputation for offering few activities outside the classroom. This often results in behavioral problems among the children.

The orphan's courts decide placement in orphanages and boarding schools. It appears the requirements for placement are quite low. Additionally, orphanages are required to accept children who request placement. This suggests children can sometimes be placed in these institutions without the oversight of a court order.

The impact on children spending significant periods of time in orphanages is not good. Institutionalized children living outside a family unit lack the skills necessary to sustain themselves as they leave these facilities upon attaining adulthood. Municipalities are required to bridge this transition with housing support and a stipend — but little to no vocational or emotional support is provided. One sad statistic indicates only 30% of these institutional graduates obtain sustainable employment during their lifetimes. One could assume many of these children simply reenter an institutional system as criminals at a future date.

Foster care is virtually non-existent in Latvia. During 2001 only 27 children in a country of 2.4 million residents were living in foster care settings; a rate of one child per every 88,888 residents. By comparison, there are 9,600 children in foster care in the State of Wisconsin; a rate of one child per every 563 residents<sup>4</sup>. Foster care has experienced little increase in Latvia and is only marginally up from the 9 children placed during 1999. The failure of foster care as a viable alternative has been attributed to these three factors: 1) lack of social workers capable of recruiting and training foster families, 2) inadequate financial support for foster parents and 3) cultural bias against the concept of foster care.

Responsibility for recruiting foster families appears to belong to the orphan's court. The statistics indicate the lack of success to date. The problem has been identified by the national government that has plans to develop a foster parent recruitment program. Foster care is seen by many Latvians involved in child welfare issues as a compelling alternative to institutionalized care.

This report includes a bewildering amount of information consisting of facts and opinions presented during the interview process, documentation provided in materials on the topic of child abuse in Latvia, and the perspectives offered by authors Michael Dwyer and Jay Sorensen. The final section of this report summarizes the content of this report, defines the area of need best served by the Kids First Fund and provides an overview of the organization's future strategy.

## STRATEGY OVERVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon the results of this fact-finding process and the mission of the Kids First Fund, the following areas should be considered key factors in the development of future grant-making activities in Latvia.

### **Partnerships with NGOs and Government Agencies**

Working on a partnership basis with local NGOs and government units is an attractive solution for serving children and represents a good division of responsibilities. It allows the Kids First Fund to concentrate its efforts on fundraising while providing grant oversight and outside expertise on projects. Latvia-based organizations can be relied upon for service delivery based upon their in-the-field experience and networks.

### **Emphasis on Rural Areas and Poverty**

Poverty in rural areas, professional education and services for children became recurring themes during the January 2004 interviews. Poverty is an overwhelming problem in Latvia and becomes acute in rural areas such as the eastern region of Latgale. The Kids First Fund should direct its resources to these areas of need by working with proactive and efficient local governments on a partnership basis.

### **Emphasis on Professional Education**

The Kids First Fund has enjoyed tremendous success with its series of educational seminars. Clearly, the need exists to reach professionals involved with child abuse issues such as social workers, schoolteachers and police officers. The social work profession needs educational support to increase overall standards of social work and to promote awareness of methods of identifying and treating abused children and women.

Similar to social workers, schoolteachers often represent an early opportunity to identify cases of abuse. They become aware of abuse by observing behavior that may include physical trauma. An interest in mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse appears to exist in Latvia. Future legislation may someday include mandatory reporting by teachers and doctors. Beyond the obvious benefits, it would be helpful to have the teaching profession support this initiative. Education and awareness are effective methods to ensure their future support.

Other professionals such as police officers are critical to the process of protecting children and women from abuse. As with any profession, some officers will become pioneers in the prevention of abuse. This was made apparent by the participation of the police at every seminar location. This group appeared eager for attention, resources and training. Continuous attention, along with cultural changes, will help make protection of children and women more of an expectation on behalf of the police and the communities they serve.

### **Recognizing Domestic Violence**

The status of children and women as victims of abuse suffers from cultural, political and economic factors. The issue of child abuse is directly connected to the issue of domestic violence and spousal abuse. This connection is not yet apparent in Latvian society. On a relative basis, child abuse receives greater attention and resources than violence against women. Yet the impact of domestic violence is very clear; the abuse of any single-family member establishes a dangerous and dysfunctional dynamic within the family unit. The Kids First Fund should concentrate its resources on the establishment of a family shelter to operate as a demonstration project to address the issue of domestic violence.

## **Concluding Remarks**

The Kids First Fund was founded in 1999 and has been serving abused and abandoned children in Latvia for five years. The organization has gained substantial fundraising and grant-making experience. As of the writing of this document, the Kids First Fund has a fund balance of approximately US\$130,000. The balance is the result of very good fundraising success during 2003 and early 2004.

These resources can make a difference in the lives of abused children in Latvia. It is vital these resources are applied wisely and effectively. The input of the Kids First Fund board of directors, its supporters and most importantly — child welfare professionals in Latvia — is a necessary component of the dialogue initiated by this report. Readers are encouraged to contact the authors with comments, questions and feedback.

### ***Respectfully submitted,***

*Michael Dwyer (Board Member) and Jay Sorensen (President)*  
*The Kids First Fund, Inc.*

## INTERVIEW RESOURCES IN LATVIA

The following persons participated in interviews with Kids First Fund board member Michael Dwyer and president Jay Sorensen in Latvia on January 17-20, 2004. The information presented in this report represents the interpretations of Michael Dwyer and Jay Sorensen and are not necessarily endorsed by the persons interviewed.

- Ms. Ligita Suca, Mersrags Crisis Center
- Ms. Antonina Zeberga, Day Centre for Children in Ventspils
- Ms. Arija Baltina and Ms. Ramute Baltedone, Latvian Association of Social Workers
- Natalija Sokolova, Latvia National Human Rights Office (LNHRO)
- Iveta Kelle, Latvian Sustainable Social Services Project
- Ms. Ilse Freimane, Lawyer at Riga City Orphan's Court
- Dr. Ainars Bastiks and Ms. Victoria Kandrusina, Ministry for Special Assignments for Children and Family Affairs
- Dr. Andris Berzins, Riga Samaritan Association
- Ms. Sandra Sebre and Ms. Agnese Saldezde, Dardezde Children's Center
- Ms. Inese Stankus-Visa, Crisis Centre for Kids
- Ms. Vita Karklina, Youth Health Centres Organization in Latvia
- Ms. Ilse Barkevica, Youth Health Centre of Latvia
- Ms. Sigita Rozentale, Ministry of Welfare
- Dr. Valdis Rande, Kids First Fund Ambassador to Children