

Edinburgh Volunteers needed by Chernobyl Children's Life Line

A charity set up to improve the health of children from Belarus and Ukraine – two countries still suffering from the harrowing effects of the Chernobyl nuclear explosion 25 years ago – is calling for volunteer families to host children on their next visit to Edinburgh.

The call for volunteers comes as a group of nine children brought to Scotland for a respite break by Chernobyl Children's Life Line (CCLL) get ready to be guests of honour at a special reception hosted by Deputy Council Leader Steve Cardownie at the City Chambers this afternoon.

The children, who range in age from nine to 13, will return to Belarus on Wednesday, having spent the past few weeks in Edinburgh and the Lothians, where they have enjoyed a variety of activities such as go-karting, climbing and swimming, and visits to attractions including Edinburgh Castle, the Zoo and Mary King's Close.

They have also attended dentist and optician appointments and have spent time in various city schools. The children are given accommodation by local families, who provide a 'home from home' for them during their stay, or part of it.

Belarus and Ukraine received 70% of the radioactive fallout and as a result, thousands of children continue to be born with or go on to develop thyroid cancer, bone cancer and leukaemia.

Chernobyl Children's Life Line brings victims to the the UK for respite breaks. These breaks give the children the opportunity to to live in an uncontaminated environment – an

experience which strengthens their damaged immune systems and is believed by some doctors to lengthen their life expectancy by up to two years.

Councillor Cardownie said: "It's very distressing to think that there are children still being born with thyroid cancer, leukaemia and other life-threatening conditions due to the fallout of the Chernobyl nuclear explosion 25 years ago. Thanks to the tireless hard work and compassion of the CCLL's Edinburgh Link over the past nine years, countless children have enjoyed a welcome break here, experiencing fun activities, meeting caring people and making new friends. I'm delighted to be hosting this special reception today in honour of the children's courage and as a way of saying thank you to all those who welcome them into their homes during their stay here."

Norma Smith, Chairman of CCLL's Edinburgh Link, said: "We should very much like to be able to invite more children to spend time with us in Edinburgh, as the improvement in their health is noticeable to the host families even in a period of a month. There are two restricting factors – funds and host families. Thanks to local generosity, funds are usually attainable, but host families are much more difficult to come by! All who host find it most rewarding and enjoyable. Do not worry about the language problem – it is amazing how communication can be made even when you do not have any words in common. (The Leader, who travels with them and meets them almost daily, is always at the end of a phone.) Mime is remarkably effective and fun for all. We should welcome any offers of interest or help."

CCLL's Edinburgh Link was founded nine years ago by a small but enthusiastic group of people, all determined to do their bit to help the children still living with the after-effects of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. Each summer, the link brings a group of children from Belarus to the Edinburgh area for a month of rest and recuperation.

The children live with host families in and around Edinburgh (from Penicuik to Pencaitland) and are provided with a full programme of outings and activities during their stay. For the past two years, CCLL's Edinburgh Link has also hosted a group of children from the north of the Ukraine for three weeks over the Christmas period.

People interested in providing accommodation on future Chernobyl Children's Life Line visits to Edinburgh are encouraged to contact the charity's local link by email at edinburgh@ccll.org.uk

Jim Gillies, author of the book "To Chernobyl with Love", will be giving a short presentation at this afternoon's reception. Jim has staged an annual vigil for the victims of the nuclear fallout since 1987 and, for the last 25 years, he has campaigned tirelessly to raise funds for medical supplies and other basic necessities which he delivers personally to the destitute children of Malin, Ukraine.