

LATEST NEWS FROM THE LIVSLUST-DZIVESPRIEKŠ VOCATIONAL SCHOOL FOR ORPHANED AND OTHER VULNERABLE TEENAGERS IN LATVIA

Festive celebration of 15 years of successful work

On May 28th Livslust-Dzivespriekš' 15th anniversary was celebrated at the school with the Latvian and Swedish flags flowing. More than 200 people gathered in the sunny weather for the ceremonies. There were guests from Sweden, Latvian politicians and representatives of many of the companies that Livslust co-operates with. There were a large number of former pupils, many with their own families.



Former students, who thanks to Livslust have a chance for a good life despite a bad start in life. Many of the couples who now have children met while they stayed at the school. The fact that so many come back for different events shows that the school still means a lot to them and this continued contact is greatly appreciated.

The celebration program included many speeches and singing of the students. The guests were welcomed by the school's CEO Liga Landisa and Edijs Petersons, headmaster 1995-2008 and now chairman of the Dzivespriekš board. Then Kerstin Nordin told the story of why she took the initiative to start Livslust-Dzivespriekš. Livslust's chairman Martin Moström talked about the future and thanked the school staff for their efforts. Raimonds Vejonis, Latvian Minister of Environment and Local Government, who made his first visit to the school, spoke about the importance of the school. The official Latvia was represented also by representatives of the education office of Kandava's municipality, the mayor of the neighboring village of Vane and vice chairman of the Tukums municipality.



From Livslust in Sweden came Eva Christensson, volunteer since 1995, including several years as chairman, Martin Moström, current chairman and Kerstin Nordin, Livslust's founder and first chairman.

According to Latvian tradition there were many celebration speeches and gifts and flowers were handed over. After a nearly two-hour ceremony a delicious lunch was served. The food was donated by Vairak Saules, the school's partner in the kitchen training. It was cooked and served by the students. Then it was time for a tour around the nicely decorated facilities. The school's various activities were presented in tents set up in the courtyard and nice products from the sewing workshop and the carpentry were sold.



In one tent the kitchen students Mairita Mikele, Edgars Audze, Janis Bruksteins had great fun demonstrating how to cook traditional Latvian pasties.



After all the ceremonies and many happy reunions, it was time for dinner and dancing for all who did not have to take the bus back home.



The carpenter students Dainis Strazdausks and Ojars Upits showed their work together with their teacher Normunds Pilnieks.



Livslust's longterm partner Oriflame holds an annual major conference with about 5,000 participants from around the world. Over the past three years, two students from Livslust have worked together with the Oriflame team during the event. This brings a unique chance to travel and to practice English and collaboration. Here Johan De Geer, CEO of Oriflame Latvia, announces that it will be Janis Drelings and Diana Vitol who get to go to this year's Gold Conference in Lisbon.

They met at livslust

Inga came to Livslust from a poor family in the neighboring village Vane. Her father had died and she was happy to come to Livslust after 9th grade. She took the cooking program and graduated in 2008 and has since attended high school in Baldone. Arvids came to Livslust 2007 and participated in the carpenter program. He has grown up among various relatives after his parents lost custody due to alcoholism. 2009 he graduated and is now attending the second year of training in ecotourism at the vocational school in Priekule and wants to engage in sustainability and green forests. Both have received support from Livslust scholarship fund for their further studies. Inga and Arvids met at Livslust and have been together ever since. Now, Inga is at home with little Rudolfs.



Inga Birzina and Arvid Rozitis with their 4 months old son Rudolfs.

Livslust gave them a new start

Kaspars grew up with his aunt. First he went to another vocational school but failed the tests and was accepted at Livslust instead. He started the painters program in 2000 and did well enough to make it into further studies at Skrunda vocational school. Now he lives in Riga and works with Livslust's partners Krasu Serviss, a painting company.

Arturs is an orphan and lived with relatives in Kandava when he came to Livslust in 2004. He trained as a painter but has since changed his focus and now studies at the maritime school in Liepaja.

Lauris grew up with a single mother under poor circumstances in Kuldiga. In order to afford to buy clothes, he had to work while he was in elementary school. He came to Livslust in 2004 and graduated as a painter in 2006. He has done very well since then and today he is a works manager at Krasu Serviss. He lives in Riga with his wife and son.



It is great to meet "old" students and hear that they are well. Here are a few young men who left school a few years ago but are happy to visit now and then. Kaspars Ansons, Arturs Grigulis and Lauris Petkevics with his son Edijs.

Livlust history in brief

After the Soviet collapse in 1991 Kerstin Nordin traveled to Latvia to see a country she had heard much about. She was appalled at how worn, gray and poor it was and tried to find some way to help. Save the Children took her to Riga's juvenile prison where she found a large number of imprisoned teenagers, some just because they had stolen food. She was told that they were either orphans from state institutions or came from poor families with alcoholic parents who could not give any support. At that time there was no system to take care of them and the risk of becoming involved in crime and prostitution was great. Kerstin realized that vocational training would enable these young people to support themselves in an honest way.



The first board of Livlust 1993: Christer Magnusson, Kerstin Nordin, Johan Holmsäter and Laila Freivalds.

In 1993 she founded the Livlust Foundation with the purpose of providing rehabilitation and professional training to disadvantaged youth. The goal was for them to become a resource in the community rather than a burden. In 1994 the Latvian organization Dzivesprieks was founded to run the business on site. By the help of Latvian contacts Livlust was offered an old hospital that was to be closed and that would fit for the purpose. The building was in need of a complete renovation. This was achieved thanks to support from SIDA, EU, Swedish companies, unemployed Swedish and Latvian construction workers and a number of dedicated volunteers.



The house before and after renovation.

The first six youths came in 1994-95 and went to live in apartments in a former collective farm together with the construction workers and the new employee Edijs Petersons. They helped in the construction work and learned a lot. Most of them were later employed in the construction industry. After two years the house was ready enough to allow the first staff and students to move in. The inauguration was held in May 1996 by Queen Silvia of Sweden, who is the patron of Livlust.



Queen Silvia in 1996 with Peteris, Edite, and Mareks, some of the first students who all helped with the renovation.



The Queen came back to the 10th anniversary in 2006 and celebrated together with the students.

Fifteen years later, the school has had nearly 300 students. 80% of those who leave school lead secure lives with work or further studies. The school has developed its own methods where social rehabilitation has a large place together with four vocational programs, English, training in how to use computers and practical life skills. There is now a growing interest in Livlust's methods among others working with children at risk.



The graduates of 2007

The "Dzivesprieks-Renceni" project

In Burtnieku municipality there is a project for children from poor dysfunctional families with alcoholic parents who cannot take care of them. The children, who are 7-15 years old, live in a dormitory run by the municipality. Here they receive help with schoolwork, participate in recreational activities and receive social rehabilitation according to the Livlust-Dzivesprieks model. The project is led

by social worker Ieva Ruka, who has been in Aizupe to learn. The following activities are on the program: individual counseling to plan the future; the step-by-step system - a step model to motivate personal development; morning assembly; various courses; sand-, art- and movement-therapy; collaborative training; social events and excursions. While the children are cared for, the municipality works to motivate families to change their habits to be able to care for their children. The project is funded in collaboration between the Foundation 100%, Wennmalm-Eriksson's Foundation and Burtnieku municipality.

Changes in the boards

We would like to thank Carl Johan Smith, who has left the Livslust board and say welcome to Elisabet Andersson, among many other things Secretary General of SOS Children's Villages in Sweden 2000-2009, and Thomas Lithner, an entrepreneur who in 1992 founded the company Struktur where he has been CEO, Marketing director and Project manager.

New on the board of Dzivesprieks in Latvia is Edgars Zalans, former Minister of Municipalities in the Latvian Government.



This year's anti-smoking day was as usual spent in nature with hiking and barbecue.

We need...

As we supply the students who are leaving with a start-kit to their new homes, we always need: Sheets, pillow-cases, towels and kitchen equipment as well as fresh teen clothing and shoes. Right now we also need 30 new 90 cm beds and wardrobes for the rooms.

Miscellaneous

- On June 21st there was a graduation party for 18 students who now will leave school. Most of them already have jobs or have decided to continue to study with support from Livslust's Scholarship funds.
- "This was like two years at the University" - one of the many positive statements after the final seminar for the Riga municipality in which they studied Livslust-methods in Aizupe.
- As usual the second year students have been out practicing for three weeks. For many of them, this leads to employment.



Here four happy students pose in really nice sports clothing that Houdini Sportswear donated to the school. A much appreciated gift.

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