

## A life sentence

# Children with mental disability in the Russian Federation

In the Russian Federation, although a growing number of families are now bringing up children with mental disability at home, the overwhelming majority of such children are confined to state institutions.

There are 155 *internats* (state orphanages) in the Russian Federation which are home to around 29,000 children. A further 19,400 children up to the age of four are housed in children's homes. A significant number of these children have a mental disability.

Parents of children born with mental disability are generally recommended to give up their child to state care at birth. If the parents agree, **they sign a document giving up their legal rights as parents**. This procedure has typically been applied to babies with Down's syndrome. When the child is older the same procedure may come into play if she or he is suspected of having cerebral palsy or autism.

A further assessment of children with mental disability is conducted when they reach the age of four. It is at this stage that **most are declared "unfit to be educated"**. Many will then remain in state care for the rest of their lives as there is no requirement for a review of this decision.

Children with mental disability in *internats* are often kept in cruel and degrading conditions. **Many are permanently kept in bed and most have little opportunity for play**. No effort is made to encourage their development as they are considered "uneducable". Doctors working in *internats* have described them as suffering from conditions such as "**imbecility**" and "**idiocy**", which do not exist in the World Health Organization's International Classification of Diseases.

Amnesty International considers that such treatment shows no respect for the rights of children with mental disability.

**It is now time for this to change.**

[Photo caption]

Above: A child in an internat in the Russian Federation. Inset: Ksyusha Krasovskaya is 12 years old and lives with her family in the Moscow region. Her parents set up the organization "The same as you", with other parents of children with Down's syndrome. © Valery Shchekoldin. © MOBOOID – The same as you

[end caption]

Dear Mr Putin,

Just like Katrina, every child deserves the opportunity to learn and play and the chance to fulfil their potential, whatever that may be.

I want you to ensure that all institutionalized children in your country, including those with mental disability, are provided with real opportunities for play and education. For all Russian children, it is the government's role to ensure their dignity, to promote their independence and to facilitate their involvement in the community.

Please help these children to enjoy the rights they deserve.

Name  
Address

President of the Russian Federation  
Vladimir Putin  
Kremlin  
103132 Moscow  
Russian Federation

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You can make a difference...

Katrina is seven years old and lives in the United Kingdom. She has Down's syndrome. She goes to her local primary school, where she attends regular classes and enjoys playtime – all with appropriate support in accordance with her age and ability. Katrina is a bright and happy young girl. She is enjoying her right as a child to learn, play and live a full and proper life, which unfortunately many children do not experience.

[photo caption]

Above: Katrina (left) doing maths with classmates at her local primary school. © Private  
Right: Katrina's letter to President Putin.

[end caption]

Katrina knows that for most children with Down's syndrome in the Russian Federation life is very different. She has written to President Vladimir Putin, because she would like him to see that she is able to learn, play and lead a normal life like other children.

Katrina's letter can help make a difference. Join Katrina in calling for a positive change for institutionalized children in the Russian Federation. Complete the attached postcard, affix a stamp and send it to Mr Putin. You can also visit the Amnesty International website [www.amnesty.org/russia](http://www.amnesty.org/russia) for more information and to take further action.

Our collective action through sending postcards will make President Putin and the Russian authorities consider our requests.  
Together we CAN make a difference.

[photo caption]

A letter from seven-year-old Katrina (below), who lives in the United Kingdom, to President Putin.

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[end caption]

