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Children from Belarus “refuel” in the Nassau region

During the last visit of a delegation from the Winden association “Children of Chernobyl” to Minsk in May, Palina’s mother said: “I don’t want to think about the illness any more, just to concentrate on looking forward.” Most of the 14 children currently holidaying in the Nassau region have very good chances of putting their illness further behind them. At the Hübingen holiday park, they are able to enjoy the pure nature of their surroundings; and during a trip to Neuwied Zoo, they come face to face with animals from far-flung countries for the very first time. Larking about on the trampoline is also an integral part of their holiday experience.



An albino like Martin may well stand out for his physical appearance – caused by a low number of red blood cells – but looking at all the other children laughing and having fun at Nassau’s open-air pool, you wouldn’t have any idea what they’d been through, in particular those with leukaemia.



The language barrier poses no problems, thanks to Albina from Belarus, one of the group leaders who speaks excellent German; otherwise, it’s a matter of facial expressions and gestures for day-to-day communication. All the activities leave the children with a good appetite – they’re no different from any other children in that respect either.



Economic hardship may be a thing of the past in Belarus, yet the children are delighted with the second-hand clothes donated by a large number of people in the Nassau region.



Their holiday would not be possible without such donations and the many days' hard work put in by volunteer helpers, in particular Maria Meuer's circle of women volunteers, including Olga Pabers-Bersinsch (Winden), Heide Menze (Nassau) and Ellen Bassert, Eva Schmidt and Sigrid Paul (Singhofen), who are on hand every day to help out the Belarus group leaders.



Olga, a doctor working at a children's hospital in Minsk, has also travelled with the group this year. Her job is to ensure that the children not only get their medication, but that they are also supervised and well looked after 24/7.

Empirical evidence has shown that holidays, such as this one in the Nassau region, prolong the lives of children – as the slogan of a well-known oil and gas company goes: “Refuel here”.

Text and photos: Dietmar Menze, Nassau, 2nd of August 2010