

GOOD NEWS FOR ROMANIA - NEWSLETTER – FEBRUARY 2005.

Dear Friends,

On arrival in Bucharest with my friend Lynda, we found lots of snow on the ground and temperatures of minus 9 degrees, a bit warmer than expected, but still very cold! Our aim during this trip was to give encouragement and distribute aid taken with us to children and families in need, to buy shoes, school books and equipment, food and anything else needed to give these families and children in Barlad help they desperately need. The first days in Barlad were visiting families and we were able to give all of them the gifts from England, buy them new shoes, school books and equipment and help them financially.

FAMILIES WE SUPPORT.

The DRAGOMIR family are still living in extremely difficult circumstances with 13 of them in a very small dismal room. The air was full of smoke as they only had cardboard to burn, the smell was almost unbearable and with so many people living there in such squalid conditions, it simply wasn't a nice place to be. The whole family were happy to see us and were eager to tell us how difficult life was for them. We were also able to buy a new mattress for Roxana who has a serious back problem and stock them up with logs for the fire.

The TOMA family have moved out of their 'home' as it literally fell down during an earthquake in the area in November 2004. They are now in a tiny apartment but their conditions are not good with cramped conditions and very damp walls. Again, the smell was unbelievable, I must say, scarves come in useful sometimes! Mrs Toma cried as we gave her the help, particularly the financial help. She hugged us and told us how grateful she is to everyone and to God for this help which made such a difference to her and her family.

The VICOL family, Maria, (Mum), Bogdan and Oana live in their tiny apartment with only one room to sleep in. It is spotlessly clean and Maria is devoted to her children, but life is extremely hard. The apartment block houses lots of 'unsavoury' characters, and because these people have not paid their bills, Maria is without heating or any means to cook a hot meal. She showed us papers proving that she had paid her bills, but because it is a communal fuel supply controlled by the local authority, there is nothing she can do! Maria sobbed when she told us how hard life was, but was extremely grateful for all the help we were able to give her.

For the DONCIU family life is also not easy. Andreea, who had the eye operation paid for by G.N.F.R. looked lovely and was wearing her new glasses which we recently bought for her. She arrived home from school with her little sister Georgiana, who was eager to entertain us! They were very happy with all their gifts and help and for Georgiana, seeing her new toys, sweets and new red boots, made her squeal "ooooo la la!"

I think the MARCU family is the one heavy on my heart at the moment. Dana has four children from 4 – 16 years. Dana's husband used to beat her and abuse her children, so when she was expecting David, her youngest, Dana decided to leave the family home. Claudiu and his wife Ada helped Dana a lot, particularly after David was born allowing them to live at their home, but unfortunately, her older three children had to go into orphanages. David is not a well child as he has a medical problem with his blood and as yet, no diagnosis has been made for his problem. Dana now lives in a small rented apartment, but she can't have her children back because her apartment is not hers and she does not have a job! The children do visit her occasionally, they were there for one day during our trip, but sending the children back hurts incredibly. She is a good Mum

and helps Claudiu and Ada with the street children. All she wants is her family to be together again, not much to ask.

STREET CHILDREN.

There are still around 10 children that we know of living on the streets of Barlad so life is very hard for them. For the NEGOI brothers, ALEXANDRU & BOGDAN, their home is the railway station.

They visit Claudiu's home, and also Dana's home regularly for a bath, hot food and change of clothes, but they were eager to show us their new sleeping arrangements. A policeman at the railway station has kindly given them a room to sleep in overnight. We were not allowed to take photographs, but it is warm and they sleep on crates covered with cardboard and a blanket. They have no light or water, but to them, it is better than being in the open air. We continue to support Claudiu in helping the boys in any way he can.

About 4 of these children living on the streets are girls, and are, unfortunately into prostitution. Knowing that these 13/14 yrs olds are being 'looked after' by a pimp, is always difficult to accept.

IONUT.

Ionut is a young man that G.N.F.R. helped around 11 years ago. Ionut was in a private orphanage in Botosani and was one of a group of children we took on a holiday to the seaside. Unfortunately, Ionut was put back onto the streets because the director did not like him and he then ended up in a detention centre. Trying to get him out was not easy, but with the help of the Joseph Foundation in Iasi, we succeeded. He was reintegrated with his family, but life was hard. He recently spent two years in prison for stealing bread, but now, he has been released, is working on a building site, and is much more settled and determined to lead a hard working, honest life. Seeing Ionut again was wonderful and it turned out to be his 21st birthday that day, he was very happy!

CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL – BARLAD.

Visiting the town's children's hospital was a new experience. The ambulance we sent for the hospital was there ready for any call out, and the doctors were keen to show us the new sterilizing unit we sent in November in use. The hospital was clean and warm, but very, very stark. There were no pictures, no toys and nothing to keep the children occupied, so all the children did was sit on their beds all day. The doctor took great pains to tell us that they needed more help with equipment etc, so this is one of our next 'missions'. We also saw the ambulance that we sent to the main hospital being driven through Barlad with its blue lights flashing on, a big encouragement to see it being used to help the people.

BARLAD ORPHANAGE.

We tried to visit the town's orphanage, but unfortunately, we were not allowed to without prior, written permission, and if we did get in, definitely no photographs! Why I ask?

EUROPEAN UNION.

During recent months, David and I have been enquiring through the E.U. Commission in Bucharest, about their plans to help the poorer people in Romania once they join the E.U. in 2007. We got lots of paper work, so during my time in Barlad, I made enquiries about whether any changes were being seen. The orphanage has been refurbished and there are clips on the T.V discouraging people from putting their children into orphanages. I was told they were quite shocking, saying 'orphanages are not real

homes', but in reality, until these people have money to feed their children, the orphanages will still be needed! There are still children being abandoned at the hospital today. Lots of social housing is being built, but in Barlad, the housing, which looks lovely, is cheap to rent, but the heating costs are very high. This housing is situated at least 30 minutes walk from the town and is next to a very large rubbish dump! We were told that the stench, particularly in the summer, is almost too difficult to bear. Lynda and I witnessed people scavenging on the dump looking for food or anything they could find to sell. David and I are going to keep in touch with the Delegation of the European Commission in Bucharest to keep up to date with what is happening, particularly in Barlad, to make these peoples lives more bearable, we hope to see some progress! There is still a massive need there. Yes, everything we see in our shops is there in Romania, but for these poor people, they cannot afford to buy it, so, the work continues. We cannot appreciate fully how much the help and encouragement we give these people means, their hugs and tears of joy and appreciation proved that. They were all extremely grateful for the help given, and this is solely down to people like you, so on behalf of everyone in Barlad, THANK YOU. If you would like more information or can help financially or in any way, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours gratefully,

Kath Richardson