

GOOD NEWS FOR ROMANIA – FROM BARLAD, ROMANIA, MAY 2006

Dear Friends,

As Lynda Reid and I arrived in Barlad to see the sunrise over the town, we could see an end to our 14 hour journey from the comforts of home, what would we find on this visit we asked, we were soon to find out! After 3 hours sleep, we began the task of sorting out all the wonderful goods donated by supporters of Good News for Romania, which we had sent a few weeks earlier. Claudiu, our helper in Barlad was amazed. It took us most of the day so by Saturday morning, we were ready to go shopping for shoes, food, school books etc. It was another long day of just under 200 miles round trip, but we were pleased with what we had been able to buy with the money we had been donated, Sunday was to be the first day of seeing the children!

Our first stop was Dealu Mare – what a welcome from the Munteanu family, smiley faces everywhere and great excitement again at everything we took. We were able to give them all food, new clothes, shoes, school books etc and we had lots of fun again with scoubidou, toys, chalks and the play chute, but soon we were to see something that would bring tears to our eyes. Two children from the Stancu family were sitting up at the top of the road watching for us and ran with excitement as we approached their `home`. Four children, Andre 1, Oana 7, Adina 9, and Dana 14, have living conditions that most of us would never imagine possible. The `house` with no glass in the windows, holes in the roof, no electricity or running water, no means of cooking and only one room to live in. These children have no birth certificates because their parents could not afford them, so as far as the state are concerned, they do not exist. They have no money whatsoever, so for the children, going two days without food was not unusual. Margareta, a Christian lady from the village is helping them by cooking them a meal each day and GNFR was able to give them clothes, toys, school books, shoes etc and also, we have left money with Claudiu who is going to try to get their birth certificates so that they can claim some money from the state, we pray this will be achieved!

Another Munteanu family in the village (no relation of the other one) are also very poor but hard working. They have one light bulb in their humble home which is connected by means of a wire from the other Munteanu family, at no cost. They were delighted with the help from GNFR in the form of clothes, shoes etc. Their 4 boys aged from 2 – 11 yrs, were delighted.

Some good news is that the Church for Dealu Mare is well on the way to becoming a reality. Money was provided from a Christian group in Bolton for the foundations and legal paper work and the ready made building is coming from a contact in Switzerland. There is only one final paper to get from the city hall so all being well, the Church will be up this summer, they have waited 15 years for this time to come, what excitement there will be!

Monday was the day when we would travel around 30 miles to see another family that GNFR supports, although I have never met them before, Claudiu has sent me photographs of the children with gifts sent previously. The Bagu family live in Ghicani village. Simona 9, and Oana 12 live in real poverty and again, food is not always easy to come by. We took food, clothes, shoes etc and the girls just stood looking in disbelief as they saw the bright colourful bike which had been donated. They didn't know what to say, but we could tell they were thrilled. Their parents didn't want to show us their home as the ceiling was hanging very low inside the house and they felt ashamed, but they are hard workers and were in the fields when we arrived there. When we were trying the shoes on the children, a small boy stood watching, his name was Andre and he was 11 yrs old. He had no shoes on his feet so I asked Claudiu to ask him if he had any shoes at home. He told us he didn't so we got some out and tried some on him. His little face just shone, I don't think he could believe these lovely white trainers were on his feet! We gave him a matchbox car and he was delighted and trotted off up the street to show his family.

At 8.15 on Tuesday morning, Gabriel (12) and Raluca (15) Munteanu arrived at Claudiu's house not knowing why they had been asked to come. They had walked the 7 miles from Dealu Mare and what a surprise was in store for them. We took them outside and gave them both a wonderful bike each that had kindly been donated too, the shock was almost too much for them, they couldn't believe it and they sent their thanks to everyone who helped to make this such a special day for them. But for us, we didn't know that Tuesday was going to be the worst day of all!

We travelled almost 50 miles to a family in Miclesti where the Pantea family live. Five children, Bianca 3, Romica 7, Gabriela 9, Ana-Maria 10 and Vasile 12, all live alone with their Dad. Their Mum left them when Bianca was only just over 1 yr. She told the court when she was asked to pay money for them that `they could kill them if they wanted to, she didn't care,' and she disappeared, never to be seen again. Ana-Maria at 8 years of age was now `Mum'. About a year later, the Cristea family became aware of this families plight and felt they needed to try to help. Through their Church contacts, they had heard that Claudiu, with the help of GNFR, helped children, so last October, they asked him to go and visit the Pantea children. From that time, we have been helping them. As Ana-Maria couldn't go to school because she needed to take care of Bianca, the Cristea family decided to take Bianca into their home to care for her, this way, Ana-Maria could attend school and be like a normal child for at

least some of the day. Although they live around 35 miles away, Bianca visits her family regularly, but it is always hard.

When we arrived, Ana-Maria started to cry when she saw Bianca and so everyone else did too! She had been Mum to Bianca for so long, she missed her dreadfully. All the children are well looked after and its hard to believe this was all down to the love and care of a now 10 year old little girl. Dad is out at work all the day so they stay alone for most of the time. We were able to give them all new clothes, shoes, toys, a bike, food, and vitamins. Claudiu took time to explain to Ana-Maria how to cook the food and how important it was for each child to have one vitamin tablet a day, she listened intently and nodded that she would do her very best. We noticed that she was covered in spots so Dr Claudia who was with us, took a look only to find that it was scabies. Then we noticed that Romica had a very bad, oozing ear which also needed medication, the doctor was going to sort this out for them free of charge.

Standing close by was another little girl who wasn't part of the family, again it was a village child watching on, Lavinia was about 6 yrs old and her shoes were in holes. Seeing her face when we gave her some new shoes was a delight. It is difficult to find the words to say what an experience this was. What responsibility these children have and their father is considering having them adopted so that he can re-marry! The good news is that the **Cristea family** from Dodesti, are trying to get money to extend their village home so that later this year, before the hard winter, they can take all the children to live with them, please pray that this can happen, it certainly would be a dream come true for those deserving children.

There is great excitement about going on camp this summer too. Most of these children mentioned, around 25 in total, are going away to the Danube Delta for around 10 days – 2 weeks of fresh air and lots of fun. Lots of preparation has gone into the holiday and all the outdoor toys provided will be enjoyed and Claudiu, Ada his wife and three other friends who are going as leaders/helpers/cooks, will be doing their best to ensure that everyone has a time to remember. A lot of these children will never have been out of their village so for them, it will be a whole new experience. We pray for the best time imaginable for all the children, including two of the street children, Bogdan and Alexandru who continue to live by begging daily on the trains.

We were also able to visit our other families Bogdan and Oana **Vicol** and their Mum Maria, who continues to suffer from ill health, but as ever, was delighted with all the help provided to make their lives a little easier. Andreea, Georgiana and Liviu **Dura** were very excited to see us again and Andreea continues to look well after her eye operation paid for by GNFR over 3 years ago. Again, they were thrilled with their new clothes and gifts from GNFR.

Romania still has a long way to go, there is still lots of extreme poverty and there are still many people begging, if you stop your car in the town there will soon be someone at your window asking for food or money. We visited a village school where Claudiu teaches English and it certainly made us realise how fortunate our children are to have such fantastic schools and facilities in this country. The roads in the towns and villages are atrocious, if you can't stand bumpy roads which are full of holes, don't go to Romania! One thing that gave me concern was that Claudiu says that he has been told that once Romania goes into the EU, the schools will not be allowed to teach religious education, this is something that I am going to look into! I am also going to contact the EU to find out what their plans are for helping these poor families who continue to live in unbelievably poor conditions in 2006, I will see what their response is!

Trying to put our experiences of the past week into such a short space isn't easy. Not one child asked us for, or indeed expected anything from us and everything they received was accepted graciously, it was a very humbling experience. All I can say is a very big THANK YOU to you all for all your love, encouragement and support in the form of thoughts and prayers, toys, bikes, new clothes, pens, books, soaps etc and also in the way of money. We were able to provide 38 pairs of children's shoes and each family has received help which they could never have thought possible. Our coffee morning raised a wonderful £409.30 so thank you to everyone who supported us with that. We couldn't do our work without you and you can be sure, everyone really does appreciate everything you have done! In Claudiu's words:

"You have truly helped those children with `empty feet and empty bellies', God Bless you all and
THANK YOU!"

Love and thanks,
Kath Richardson

Ps. We will be able to send some more goods to Romania mid July, if you can help with children's vitamins, new t-shirts, trousers, new shoes/trainers, socks, underwear, packets of instant whip or soup and money, please get in touch. Also, can anyone help for 1 – 2 hours with bag packing at Sainsbury's on Saturday September 9th? Please let us know if you can. Thank you from David & Kath.