

THE HAMBY FOUNDATION

Registered charity no; 1106407

Supporting Romanian children, old people and families in need

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Hello everyone – I hope you and yours are well,

We are now back home from Romania, and want to tell you the good news that our aid lorry arrived safely and was gratefully welcomed with joyful tears and open arms. It is five years since we sent over such a huge amount, and this was triggered mainly by what we saw and experienced in Romania last winter. Whilst there I sent this e-mail to England, with a heavy heart.

*Just a short e-mail whilst I am here in Romania.
I feel a long way from home today, and a bit down and helpless....*

I know we had it cold in England over the last month or so - but this is something else! This winter is so severe that even for Romania it is bad. I went to the sea today. It was completely frozen over, and the Black Sea is a very salty sea. Today at noon it was 7 below freezing. In the night it is 20 or so below freezing. In the house it is so cold we wear coats all the time - and everywhere indoors feels damp.

There are still people living (existing would be a better word) on the streets, and last week three street children froze to death. The shoes we sent out for the street children were distributed, but one young man on the photos we had who had frostbite died last week. He was buried in the shoes we sent, the only new thing he ever owned in his short life.

It kills me here to see how hard life is. Gabi's sister had to chop up their workbench last night for firewood. Next it's the skirting boards. Wood is at a premium. There is nothing left to burn to keep warm.

Everyone is poorer than when I first came here ten years ago, and I can't see

*it getting any better. Often it's a choice of food OR keeping warm.
Pray for them here, and me, and thank God you were born in the UK!*

It was this feeling of desperation and helplessness and the realization that practical aid as well as monetary aid was in short supply that led to a frenzied eight weeks of hard work, resulting in us sending out a 40 ton lorry full of aid. We have sent clothes, shoes and medicine. We were overwhelmed by the generosity of people giving us money and donating goods. Together we have achieved so much. Here are just a few examples of how much difference we made with 828 boxes of clothes, 183 boxes of soap, toiletries etc, 85 boxes of shoes, 50 sacks of bedding and 65 boxes or pallets of food, 24 bikes and lots more.

Baby clothes, nappies and baby soap and wipes etc went to the abandoned babies project in Mangalia.

In the isolated village of Poiana 140 people were given clothing and desperately poor families provided with much needed food.

Bicycles were given to enable people to get work, or for children to get to schools, or to old people that previously had to walk many miles to get to the feeding centre.

Hospital equipment, wheelchairs and medicine went to Eforia Sud hospital. More money was given than was needed to pay for the lorry so the surplus was spent on vitamins and antibiotics.

The old peoples centre, Heart to Heart also received many hundreds of boxes of clothing, shoes and food from us. They help around 50 elderly people each day. We were told that the items had arrived just in time, and when I went to where the old folk lived to help deliver things I was shocked. The poverty is getting worse. To see old men and women of 70 or 80 years of age sleeping on earth floors or under stairwells and in rooms with no heat or light is heartbreaking.

An old man, Gheorghe, lives in the burned out shell of his former home. A candle had caused a fire and now he lives outdoors with his few miserable possessions around him.

The Church has helped him with a temporary roof over one small area, but you could see the sadness in his eyes.

But he was so thankful for the clothes and food we gave him.

Many of the homeless old people previously had good housing. But after Communism fell the original owners of a property previously seized could, in theory, reclaim it. Instead, people who can afford to bribe crooked lawyers to forge ownership papers claiming these properties for themselves are forcing people out of their homes, often after 30 or 40 years with only one weeks notice. We have seen some old people go mad, or commit suicide presented with such a despairing situation. Old age pensions, already miniscule, are being cut, as are many workers wages by 25%. There are already demonstrations and one hears talk of another revolution. The situation is very grave.

PRR have two children's homes for rescued street children, and the girls home and boys home received hundreds of boxes of good clean clothing, shoes and food. Also toys, bikes and a table tennis table were delivered. But PRR also still feeds and clothes around 40 street children, and we were able to provide clothing and food for this work. I went on the streets to help with the food and clothes distribution. The situation is upsetting to see.

Kids live in old sewers and heating vents in the most appalling conditions imaginable. The floors move, crawling with huge cockroaches. The smell of urine and faeces greets you as you meet these young people. Nobody has washing facilities, toilet paper or even handkerchiefs. All have lice. Goodness knows what I risk shaking hands or hugging these kids - or what I walked through! - but the kids welcomed me and I was moved to see them again. Some are old faces I have known for many years. They are the unloved, the abused, the sad and the mad.

One young man has a discoloured and hugely swollen abscess on his leg. When I inquired what would happen, I was told that the hospitals do nothing for the homeless. His leg may be amputated as an emergency, but he would still probably die. We gave instructions to take him to a private doctor and money to get help for him. We cannot allow another young man to die.

Another boy, Bogdan 15, has only been on the streets a few months. His dad is a violent alcoholic and his mum had been taken into hospital and had ‘disappeared’. Another boy, 11, cries inconsolably as his sister has died. I watched these lonely youngsters sitting in the gutter eating the cold meal we had brought, and thought how unfair life can be. Truly, there but for the grace of God go any one of us. Every hungry child or homeless person said Grace before eating. And in every case – in every single case – where we gave out food or saw clothing being handed out I heard the same thing over and over again.

‘Multumesc mult, Domnul. Sarutmana’.
‘Thank you, we kiss your hand’.

Lastly, it is my turn to thank you, humbly and from the bottom of my heart for all your help. This lorry was irritating, time-consuming, annoying, and exhausting – but it was worth it!

Our sincere thanks and deep appreciation to everyone – I hope we have not forgotten anyone – but I trust that your real thanks is to know that together we have achieved something good. Something truly worthwhile that will enhance, enrich and in many cases save lives. Thank you for the trust you put in me. And finally, as I always say, from those you will never meet, Thank you, and God bless

Chris

The Hamby Foundation exists to help the poorest and at risk children and old people of Romania