

Romania Visit

As part of being in the 6th Form at Bishops High School we are given the opportunity to travel to Romania as part of a group to complete some charity work working in the gypsy camps. After a successful interview, held in October 2009, myself and 12 other pupils started the daunting task of raising £12,000! The team was supported by “Teams 4U” and in particular by Dave Cooke who thought up the idea of the “Christmas Shoe Box Appeal.”

Lots of fund-raising events were arranged, including numerous cake sales within school, a music concert night, a huge raffle, chocolate tombola's, non-uniform days and a really successful “Learn to Jive” night held here in Christleton. I know that we would not have managed to collect all the money that we needed without the fantastic support that we were given from the school, and in particular Mr Jones, and our parents, brothers and sisters.

On the 20th March this year we all met at the airport at 6am full of excitement for our adventures! After a very long journey of 11 hours and travelling through 4 countries we arrived in our hotel in Oradea in Romania very tired, so after a quick supper we went to bed!

The next morning, we met up with the family that were going to be our interpreters for the time that we were in Romania. His name was “Nica.” We chose to go to church with him and his family, the service lasted three hours and we couldn't understand a word of it as it was all in Romanian! However Nica explained that “ISUS” meant Jesus and “AMIN” meant Amen.

In the afternoon we travelled in a very tatty minibus to a gypsy village at Urvind which was about twenty minutes away from where we were staying. This village was going to be where we would be spending a majority of our time over the next week. As we entered the village camp we saw crowds of young children awaiting our arrival. As we approached, the children were chasing our minibus until we stopped and they were then surrounding us, waving and giggling, full of excitement looking forward to the activities that we had planned to do with the children. As we got off the minibus the young children, full of trust, just slipped their hands into ours and led us to their school for our meeting point. The children were continually smiling, wanting to play games, and be the centre of our attention. The children loved having their photographs taken, continually saying, “Facham Posa”, (which means take my picture), and seeing their images on the cameras digital screen.

The housing conditions that the families lived in really shocked me. There was a constant stream of raw sewage running through the camp and there were dead rotting animal carcasses abandoned nearby. The family that I visited were living in the equivalent of what we would consider to be a garden shed. This was home to eight people, seven of whom were children. It was very humbling to see how the people coped with having to live in such conditions but were also so happy. It made me think of how

lucky we are and how so often we take things for granted or moan about things when things are not always going the way that we want them to.

During our time in the gypsy camp at Urvind, we spent several days and lots of time was spent



playing with the children who appeared to be thriving on all the attention we were able to give them. Some of the children's favourite activities included face painting, the girls enjoyed having their nails painted (which was a thing that had never happened for them before), teaching them some English songs, performing a Christian based drama as well as other craft activities. The boys also enjoyed having a football game. The children were able to teach us some Romanian songs with hand clapping actions.

We also made a visit to a village called Dumbrava, where we visited an Old Peoples Home. The residents there had been abandoned by their families and were being supported by the charity "Teams 4 U". I was totally unprepared for the conditions that I was met with there. There were up to five residents squashed into a bedroom. The residents were so happy to see us. We were able to give all the residents gifts of chocolate, toiletries and items of clothing. One elderly lady told us through an interpreter that she would like a skirt, when one was found she cried and kissed our hands. Our small gestures seemed so minor and inadequate for the amount of gratitude and thanks shown to us. A further visit was made to a group of women in their twenties who had been abandoned by their families and had had to rely on prostitution to gain an income. The women had been found and rehoused in a flat together and were starting, with the support of the charity, to turn their lives around. Whilst we were visiting them they chose to sing for us, it was amazing to hear their beautiful voices singing in harmonies with such emotion.

As the time came to leave Romania we all had to say goodbye to the children that we had come to know during our time in the camps. It was so hard to say goodbye and I wanted to sneak some of the children home in my suitcase! I will never forget pulling away from the camp in a village called Tinca where a little girl who had befriended me was blowing kisses to me and was running faster and faster trying to keep up with the minibus as it gained speed. Once she was out of sight I was able to see the hearts that she had traced on the minibus windows.

I will never know whether what we did whilst in Romania will have been a lasting influence on the children and the older people that we were so lucky to have met, but my time in Romania has influenced me. I am truly appreciative of all the people that support me and appreciate more the material things I have around me. It was a truly life changing experience.



I am planning to visit Mexico in August with local Guiding Members and can't wait to get my travelling shoes on again.

Hannah Ewins, member of the Crew