

# **LIGHT FOR CHILDREN**

## **AGM**

### **30<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2018**

Thank you very much for attending the meeting this evening and for your continued and much appreciated support over the last twelve months. It is my privilege to be able to update you about the work of *Light for Children* in and around Dorohoi, in the county of Botosani, in north east Romania.

*Light for Children* aims to advance the Christian faith through the relief of need, hardship or sickness amongst children and young people, resident in, or citizens of Romania, by offering social, educational and spiritual support according to Christian principles.

#### **1. Children and teenagers living in care**

There are currently 140 children and teenagers living in 23 apartments in Dorohoi, which are owned and run by the Romanian child protection authorities. Each apartment is home to six or seven children. Adult carers, who work twelve hour shifts, supervise the children on a rota basis. There is always one adult carer in each apartment. Living conditions in the apartments are good and food is provided for the children. As a charity, we continue to support these children by enabling them to access educational and medical opportunities which would otherwise not be available to them.

#### **Education**

The children living in the apartments attend a number of local schools and are provided with basic stationery, but the authorities do not provide the money for their text books. We have continued to fund the children's text books and to pay for a number of the younger children to spend extra hours at school each afternoon, to receive help with their homework. A psychologist continues to work with children who need speech therapy or individual counselling to overcome specific challenges in their lives. He is a very calm and positive man who has been equally as encouraging to the adult carers as to the children with whom he works.

#### **Medical support**

All of the apartment children are registered with a local GP. Their repeat prescriptions are now purchased by the child protection authorities but often take 7-10 days to be processed. If the children have acute infections which need urgent attention, the prescription issued by the GP is only valid for 24 hours and so we step in to cover any costs, ensuring that the children receive their medication on time. We continue to supply all of the apartments with basic medication such as Paracetamol and Ibuprofen.

Many of the children have dental problems but again there is no provision for their dental care, so we have maintained a good relationship with a local **dentist**, who treats the children, charging us £30 - £50 a month.

We have been very fortunate in maintaining a very good relationship with a local **optician**, who not only treats the children and young people very well but also finds ways to keep the costs down for us. The doctor and her husband have their own business and in October 2017 (twelve months on from their first campaign to help our children), they once again offered free consultations to 20 children and for anyone who needed glasses, only charged us for the frames, with a 20% reduction.

The optician's husband is a priest and runs a children's choir at his church. Just before Christmas, we took a group of the apartment children to the opticians to sing carols and thank the doctor for her kind generosity throughout the year. The priest arranged for his choir to be there at the same time, so the two groups of children sang for each other.

**A 5 year old girl** continues to receive chemotherapy for acute lymphoblastic leukaemia. She travels to Iasi (150km from Dorohoi) for blood tests on a monthly basis, leaving home at 5:30am and returning some twelve hours later. She is a very happy, bright little girl, who currently attends nursery and is due to start school in September. She has a team of dedicated friends (the head of the apartments, her carer and myself) who communicate regularly and will do anything to help her on her journey to recovery. As a charity we are trying to give her the best possible chance to fight her illness by funding some of her medication, blood tests, extra food and toiletries.

### **Special projects for the apartment children.**

The child protection authorities have recently provided the construction materials needed to **renovate the bathrooms** in eight of the state run apartments, including new bathroom furniture, ceramic tiles and adhesive. The authorities haven't been able to provide a tradesperson to do the necessary work, so we have recently paid a local man £240 to renovate one of the bathrooms. Before Christmas, a group of the children and their carers produced some beautiful craft items which were sold at a special local event to raise money to pay the same man to renovate some of the other bathrooms. Fundraising for this project is ongoing locally in Dorohoi and we hope that by the end of this year, the work will have been completed. Three bathrooms have already been completed.

During August 2017, a team of people from **Reigate Baptist Church** in Surrey came to Dorohoi, to support the work of Association "Neemia", another local charity with whom we work closely. They particularly wanted to run holiday club activities for children and so I was asked to arrange for a group of the apartment children to attend craft and sports activities. The people from Reigate fell in love with the children and a number of them have since committed to supporting our work financially on a monthly basis. The group also contributed to the cost of a 3 day break in the mountains for 100 of the apartment children at the end of August, as did *Light for Children*.

## **Christmas**

Before Christmas, we received 100 shoebox gifts from Reigate for the younger children who live in the apartments. On 5th December, we invited the children to Pattichips, a local Christian restaurant, where we served the children with pizza, juice and cupcakes as they listened to a group of children from our local church singing Christmas carols. We then handed out song sheets and invited young volunteers from the apartments to accompany the singing with percussion instruments! We gave the younger children their shoebox gifts and then went to the apartments where the older teenagers live and delivered other small gifts to them. As this was the night that the children were expecting “Saint Nicholas” to leave gifts in their boots, we found lines of boots waiting for us!

During December, there were all sorts of Christmas concerts and events organised for the children and so I tried to attend and support as many as possible.

## **2. Young people who have moved on from the apartments**

### **Casa Neemia**

**Casa Neemia** is the name that has been given to a house that has been built over the last two years by the local charity Association “Neemia”, to provide accommodation for young people who have come out of the care system. Some work is still being done on the house, particularly in the loft space, but the first residents were able to move in at the beginning of October 2017.

We are delighted that some of the young people whom we have known for 20 years, have been given the opportunity to live in the house, where they each have their own en-suite bedroom, as well as access to a fully furnished kitchen, living room and laundry room. At the back of the house, there is an allotment garden, which the young people have already been able to use whilst the house has been under construction.

**A young lady**, who was one of the original Dersca children and who left the care system in 2012, had lived in several very basic rented rooms, where she had to fetch water from a well and light a wood fire, before moving into Casa Neemia. She is delighted to have central heating, her own bathroom and the use of an automatic washing machine. She receives a disability living allowance and tops that up by finding small cleaning jobs. A group of friends from Project Hope in Glasgow, who have known her for many years, have committed to fundraising £50 a month, which she will receive for cleaning Casa Neemia. She was interviewed for the job back in September of last year and is now enjoying having the responsibility of keeping all the communal areas clean and tidy.

**A young man**, also one of the original Dersca children, continues to work at the restaurant “Pattichips” and to play his guitar with a local folk group. He has also moved into Casa Neemia and again, is delighted to have such good living conditions.

**A young man**, who now lives and works in Brasov, came home for a week at Christmas and was able to stay at Casa Neemia.

**A young man**, also from Dersca, moved into Casa Neemia in December and after a short break, has returned to working for several hours each day in Association Neemia's charity shop.

Last year, it was a privilege to be invited to a **wedding**, where the bride and groom, as well as their Godparents, were all HIV+. The bride and her Godmother were original Dersca children and we have seen all of these young people grow up in and out of hospital, so it was wonderful to be able to share in such a happy event in their lives.

### **3. Young people from local families who need support**

A **13 year old girl** with acute lymphoblastic leukaemia from a local village has now completed three years of chemotherapy treatment. She continues to travel to Iasi each month for tests, sharing the transport provided by the child protection authorities for the 5 year old girl from the apartments. The teenager's mother and the young girl's carer have become close and are very supportive towards each other. We continue to support her on a monthly basis.

With the help of the Seighford parishes, we have continued to support **a family in Dorohoi**. The mother is a widow with six children, three of whom are at university in Iasi. All three do very well and do not have to pay university taxes but they continue to need our support to pay rent and utility bills for their accommodation in Iasi.

### **4. Weekends**

The **children's orchestra** has continued to rehearse each Friday and to play regularly both in our local church and at other local venues. New songs this year have included "Be still for the presence of the Lord", "Grace Alone" and "I Exalt Thee", as well as Christmas carols. During the early part of 2017, I realised just how much time some of the young people in the orchestra spend on their phones and so at the start of the 3 month long school summer holiday, I challenged them to read two books each over the summer. As Dorohoi has a very rich Jewish history, I decided to give them books which all had a link to the plight of the Jews in the 1940s. The titles included "The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas", "Anne Frank's Diary", "The Boy on the Wooden Box" and "The Book Thief". As I gave the books out, the children looked at each other and thanked me politely. A few weeks later, I asked if any of them had finished reading their books and they were so enthusiastic about them and keen to read more.

In September, we arranged a **day trip to the mountains** for the children from the orchestra, together with the residents of Casa Neemia and visiting friends from Project Hope in Glasgow. We stopped off to visit Ciprian Porumbescu's museum (a Romanian composer), before taking a chair lift up a mountain to have a picnic in beautiful countryside.

A **teenage boy** who is a member of the orchestra, a very keen and talented musician and an outstanding public speaker, has been given the opportunity to go to a private Christian school, in Targu Mures, where the majority of his lessons are taught in English. As well as undertaking academic courses, he has the opportunity to develop both his love for music and preaching. He has lived with a wonderful foster family since he was a baby and they support him wholeheartedly. As a charity, we have committed to supporting him with £50 each month towards the cost of his schooling. He has recently completed his first semester and has received a glowing report. He loves what he is doing and is confident that he has made the right decision to change schools. He returned to his foster family for a few days at Christmas and came to our church to play in the orchestra.

We continue to look after a **ten year old boy** each weekend and during school holidays. We were delighted to be able to bring him to England in June 2017, when he was able to meet my parents and realise his dream of riding on the top floor of a London bus. He was delighted to see Big Ben, Buckingham Palace, the London Eye and Tower Bridge but was happiest of all in St James' Park, where he managed to photograph a number of squirrels and a rat! He enjoyed flying for the first time and on arrival at Luton airport, insisted on waiting to thank the pilot, for which he was invited into the cockpit.

### **Thank you**

#### **Our sincere thanks to everyone who supports us.**

A special mention to a few people:

- to the LFC committee who work so hard to raise funds and awareness for the charity and are a great support and encouragement to us personally in so many ways;

-to Lynn Walker, who has resigned from the committee this year but who has been so supportive of everything we have done since even before the charity was registered.

- to Mary Aplin and Karen Procter for all their hard work in keeping the charity's accounts in order;

- to both St John's Community Church, Rugeley Community Church and the CRES parishes for their ongoing and much appreciated support;

-to Wendy and Dave Barnsley, Sylvia and Andrew Hetherington and friends from Project Hope, Glasgow, all of whom visited us during 2017;

- to all those who support us financially, practically and/ or prayerfully.

Our love and thanks to you all, Helen.