



YOUR
LOCAL
SHOEBOX
CHARITY



Shoebox Campaign 2015



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This year we had two shoebox distribution trips, one in December and the other in January. Both teams broke new ground by going to areas new to us and to Nicu.

The December Team flew to Bucharest. Through his many contacts Nicu had planned the trip so that we could reach as many communities as possible who had never had shoe boxes previously. After a night in Bucharest we travelled to Targu Jiu, our base for 2 nights. We gave out shoeboxes in 2 small villages when we arrived, then in various church buildings on the Sunday, and then in 12 schools on Monday. This was quite a busy day but was in a fairly compact area, and we had an amazing response from the children. They couldn't believe that all these people in another country cared enough about them to send a shoebox – the looks on their faces were amazing.



We then moved into the Carpathian Mountains for our overnight stay in Petrosani and the next day distributed boxes in 5 schools with larger numbers of children. Most of these children were from families who were housed in very sad looking concrete apartment blocks built in the communist era, so although they would have had running water and electricity they were certainly appreciative of receiving shoeboxes, and again we had a marvellous response from very excited children. After early morning school distributions we then travelled to Craiova, a larger city towards the Bulgarian border and

spent the next day in schools. We then moved to Calafat, a large town right on the River Danube, looking across to Bulgaria on the other side. All around this area we found much more poverty than we had seen during the week so far.

We visited one gypsy village where things got rather frantic when everyone realised we had arrived to give out gifts to the children – plenty mothers wanted a box as well! Thankfully the leaders in the village sorted everything out. Our final distribution was around Rast and Rastu Nou one of which had been flooded five years ago in 4 feet of water from the Danube Delta. All the houses had been destroyed and people were still living in cabins that been brought in as a temporary measure. This day was organised by a team from “Casa de Speranta” – the House of Hope which helps with aid to villages in need as well as running childrens’ clubs in a centre in Bailesti, an amazing charity doing amazing work. After our final night in Craiova a 4 hour drive took us to Bucharest to fly home.

The January team flew to Budapest and, after a night in Oradea, spent the first morning in Tinca, giving out boxes in the Roma school which is supported by regular donations from Boxes of Hope, Cumbria. It was great to see and be welcomed by familiar faces of children and their dedicated teachers. The children sang to us, and the benefits of their education

were plain to see in their growing confidence. We saw 40 of the poorest children enjoying their daily hot meal, funded by Boxes of Hope, and we went to the after school club. After a couple of village distributions we prepared for our journey next day up to the Ukrainian border for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Winter had well and truly arrived, as we made our way up icy tracks alongside rivers, to some very remote villages where children live up on the hillsides and have to walk miles to school. In the conditions underfoot our vans and trailers couldn't make it to them, so the children came down to meet us, some dressed up specially for the occasion. From their shining eyes and broad smiles we knew that these gifts meant a lot to them and would be treasured.

Very few signs of commercialisation – many families spend 3 hours on Christmas Eve in church, and go again on Christmas morning. Our next journey was to Simleu Sylvaniaei where, next morning, we had an early distribution in the snow covered playground of a school for Hungarian children, some of them Roma. 2 years ago we did a very chaotic distribution from a ground floor apartment window. Quite different this year, with children lining up in their classes and waiting patiently for their boxes. One of the gypsy ladies we had met on previous occasions, living in the most appalling conditions with her three delightful and well cared for daughters, had helped with the organisation and she showed us round the awful apartment block, then up a slippery track to the tumbledown room where she and her family live, and look after Grandma. Dorina speaks good English which she learnt as a teenager at the local church, and we are hopeful for a better future for her, Josef and the girls.

Back in Oradea, we spent our last 2 days giving shoeboxes out in various locations, some house to house, some in churches. We had a challenging time in one large village, where shoeboxes have never been given out before, and where the locals had such great need that they were desperate to get their hands on anything. In the very next small village, the children were the most excited we have ever seen. They squealed with eager anticipation as they ran off home with their boxes and, as we went in, they jumped up and down with joy as they opened their gifts. Parents and grandparents embraced us and shook our hands in gratitude. The memories of that particular distribution will linger on in the minds of all the team.

Each team experienced a variety of situations, and an array of emotions, giving out shoeboxes to children who, regardless of their background, demonstrated their joy at receiving a gift from a stranger, thousands of miles away. Our thanks go to the people of Cumbria and beyond, whose generosity in so many ways makes possible this worthwhile project.



Summary of Activities, January 2015 – January 2016

Boxes of Hope, Cumbria was registered as a humanitarian aid organisation in July, 2013, to

- Make the shoebox project more local and personal to Cumbria
- Give us direct access to the children receiving the shoeboxes
- Enable us to respond to the longer term needs of the children
- Make better use of funds as, unlike larger charities, we have no staff to pay, thus enabling us to send all surplus funds to projects in Romania

Throughout 2015, groups and individuals continued to raise funds and support our regular sponsorship of Tinca School

Specific activities included:

- Funding of play equipment at Tinca School in memory of Angela Walton, a loyal and hard working supporter of the shoebox campaign for many years
- Funding of a play area at Alparea School by one of our volunteers
- Donation of surplus funds to the Prince of Wales Romania Foundation, for a project in 2016 helping 20 families each to develop a vegetable plot, learning about food production, hygiene and cookery, with a view to them starting small businesses and inspiring others

Teams from Cumbria (self funded) went to Romania in

- March/April – to spend time at Tinca School and see progress being made
- November – a recce visit prior to the January distribution trip
- December and January – 2 shoebox distribution trips

The Trustees are enormously grateful to all those individual, groups and charities who, by their continued support, help Boxes of Hope, Cumbria to thrive as a dynamic and developing charity

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