



Community Service Project to Romania

July, 2010



Aims of Project

1. To integrate handicapped, orphaned and Roma children into Romanian society, thus attempting to break down cultural barriers. Societal values are still entrenched in this former totalitarian state, and disadvantaged Romanian children are ostracised and abandoned by society at large.
2. To promote the emotional and social development of such vulnerable children.

Objectives of Project

1. To provide a range of stimulating activities, including drama, arts and crafts, sports, music and outings within a daily structured programme.
2. To nurture a friendly atmosphere in which the children feel loved and cared for.
3. To provide the children with a daily nutritious meal, a wash, basic first aid and other necessities.
4. To develop the leadership potential of Wykehamists by nurturing their ability to lead sessions, prepare resources, and organise other team members and Romanian students. During the fortnight in Romania the boys prepared activities based on the collective theme of 'People who help us'.
5. To encourage the involvement and ongoing commitment of Romanian students in caring for these children throughout the year.



The involvement of Winchester College boys in two Libra projects: Sarcele and Bacau.

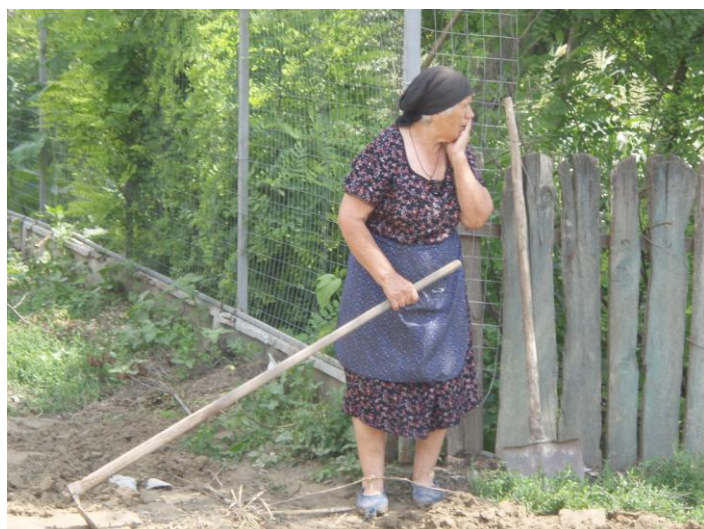
Sarcele

In July, 2010 a committed team of six College boys spent two weeks working alongside 12 other Libra students in Sarcele, a small medieval town within the Transylvanian Alps where four large Roma settlements preoccupy the hilly wastelands beyond its municipality. Sarcele has three homes for young orphans, as well as the local hospital where young patients, including babies are simply abandoned. In Bredet nearby, a large institution accommodates one hundred mentally handicapped children. The vulnerable children living here are entirely dependent on charitable donations for both their basic life necessities, and their educational needs. Wykehamists were involved in all of Libra's projects in Sarcele, working in the institution at Bredet, a purpose-built day centre in Sarcele for Roma children, a local church in a nearby Roma settlement, one of the children's homes, and entertaining abandoned children at the local hospital.



Bacau

Two College boys were part of a team of eight English students and six Romanian students, based in a very remote, poor farming region on the outskirts of Bacau, Moldavia, in the foothills of the Carpathians. Their day centre, funded by Fundatia de Sprijin Comunitar (FSC), was located in an extremely impoverished village to the east of the Siret river. Over a hundred underprivileged children poured daily into the day centre for stimulus and fun. Many walked miles down dusty dirt tracks to reach the centre. The boys endured soaring temperatures, unlike the cooler, wetter climes of Sarcele.



Libra programme

Libra students spent a fortnight working alongside a regular group of Romanian children and supporting students, to deliver a daily programme of singing, creative crafts, sports, play and storytelling. The students served lunch to the children, and washed them if necessary. At the children's home in Sarcele, a team of students prepared the children to stage a performance of the 'Lion King', presented on their final Friday morning. Children had learnt songs, made simple costumes, masks, posters and decorations for the final show. At the day centre Roma children had the opportunity to sing, dance, play and produce artwork, and visit the local library, soup kitchen, supermarket and fire station, accompanied by the Libra students. For many, it was their first visit to such mundane places, yet their excitement was overwhelming.



At Bredet the activities were less ambitious, given the limitations of the children. Creative sessions were restricted to an hour, and very simple ideas were executed. The children at Bredet responded particularly well to physical contact, so much so that they were reluctant to let go of their students at the end of the day. It was always emotional to leave them – their 'home' was a concrete shell containing ripped furniture and a pervasive stench of urine; children here are prone to vandalism and self-harm. Sam Fletcher and Alex Morse were clearly shocked by their initial visit, but soon grew accustomed to seeing young boys and girls rocking on seats on their arrival, and acquired impressive skills in handling them.



Wykehamists' contributions to the project

The boys from both teams were a tremendous credit to the College and to Libra, behaving impeccably throughout, befriending students and giving relentlessly of their time and energy to the children.

- Kazuma Fushimi was idolised in the Roma community where he was working, as local children thought he was Cacar, the Real Madrid player.
- Crispin White remained remarkably calm when in the charge of 50 excitable children. He was an outstanding team member, generating practical ideas and helping enthusiastically in the preparation of resources.
- William Harborne displayed boundless stamina organising sports for 50 children in a field of rough grass, and in baking heat. He handled the children in a mature and proficient manner.
- Adrian Chan was immensely popular with the Roma children who visited the day centre in Sarcele; they frequently crowded around him. He was adept at leading the childrens' games in the concrete area outside the centre.
- Oliver Bates, although passive at the outset was a superb team member, contributing to the planning of activities, utilising the language well, and giving constant lifts and hugs to the children. He displayed huge reserves of patience throughout his volunteering at the day centre.
- Freddie Green made a substantial effort in befriending the children, and they were always delighted to see him at the beginning of the day. They invariably spent a lot of their time jumping on him!
- Sam Fletcher was simply brilliant at handling the mentally handicapped children at Bredet. He was clearly moved by the experience, and resorted to tears on one morning. He had just the right skills and personality for this challenging task.
- Alex Morse was equally impressive at Bredet. He was not deterred by the childrens' erratic behaviour, and made genuine progress with many of the children in producing some form of creative work. He was a very positive character throughout the project.



Final Comments

CLT is most grateful to the Headmaster and to Mr Wyke for enabling the Romania project to go ahead. Many members of the College have been so generous in supporting the work of the Libra students during the past academic year. CLT is also indebted to Bill and Virginia Darley who were unstinting in their training and preparation of the boys, and in providing ongoing support in the field. Both are passionate about their cause, and great fun to work with.

For those Wykehamists involved, the Romania project has left an indelible impression. In July the Sarcele and Bacau teams left Romania with a heavy heart, knowing that those children whom they befriended and cared for, will continue to suffer in the months and years ahead. During their short time away, the boys gained a full understanding of the legacies of this former totalitarian state; discrimination towards Roma children, Romanian orphans and handicapped children is an ongoing form of apartheid, and it will take sustained charitable actions like those of the Libra Foundation to bring their emancipation. More importantly, our boys acquired great friendships with other English and Romanian students, and a heart to serve vulnerable children.

CL Talks

31st August, 2010