



School For Life

Newsletter Edition 20, Nov 2008

Registered Charity No. 1062953

Patron: Robert Carlyle OBE

www.schoolforliferomania.org

info@schoolforliferomania.org

Școală Pentru Viață

Thank you for your interest in our charity. Every six months you will hear about the latest developments at the project in Siret, and our fundraising efforts in the UK and Romania to support the growth of the work that is changing the lives of many young people with special needs in Siret.

School For Life is a registered UK charity dedicated to funding children and adults brought up in an orphanage in Siret, Romania (who now live in a Neuropsychiatric Hospital institution), providing special needs education and training so they can develop the skills they need to lead fulfilling lives.

These sessions are delivered in a school building our charity has purchased and built in the community of Siret, northern Romania. Therapeutic sessions are also provided in the Hospital for the young people not able to come to our facility.



Ana attends Școala Pentru Viața and has made a flower with tactile materials and glue

The money raised in the UK by School for Life is sent to our sister organisation in Siret, "Școala Pentru Viața", which is led and staffed exclusively by qualified people from the local community. The staff members include 2 Directors, 3 Teachers, 2 Teaching Assistants (formally orphans from the Institution), and a Medical Assistant. We also support the Teaching Assistants and 2 other young people to live in the community, enabling them to follow further education and local employment opportunities.

All funds received go directly to the project in Siret (except for bank charges to

transfer funds to Romania). All other costs, including regular trips to Siret to support the project and feedback to the UK charity meetings, and all publicity, are met by the Trustees and School For Life Friends themselves. So more than 99p of every pound you have given goes directly to the children and young adults who need it. Thank you!

School for Life raises funds in the UK through 120 people giving monthly standing orders, and other donations and fundraising events. This money is sent to Școala Pentru Viața:



SPV Team:

Above: Doina, Director of Administration and husband Radu (who runs the car wash that pays for the fuel for the school buildings, behind).

- 1. Cornelia, Director Education
- The teachers:
- 2. Mariana
- 3. Carmen
- 4. Angelica



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Latest Update from Siret

Sylvia Gurr and Lizzy Keetley spent a week in Romania in early October 2008 on one of the twice yearly self funded trips made by School For Life representatives to support the work of the teachers in Siret. Two friends of ours came along, Catherine Keetley and Karlin McMahon, their first visit to the project. Karlin writes:



From left to right: Catherine, Sylvia, Karlin, Rodica, Lenuta, Rodica (Medical Assistant), Livi. At the School buildings, drinking hot chocolate made for us by Lenuta!

"I've just returned from my first visit to Romania where I travelled by train to the small town of Siret on the Ukrainian border, keen to see for myself how School For Life Romania changes the lives of young adults who grew up in the huge children's psychiatric hospital based in Siret before it closed in 2003.

During my short stay I was privileged to see the progress made by these young adults and the sheer dedication of the teachers and people in Siret who work tirelessly to make School for Life a success. School for Life funds activities such as art, reading, writing and life skills amongst

others. I was amazed by the sheer determination and attentiveness these young adults showed when actively taking part in activities and how they show immense pride and enjoyment in their work. These activities are vital to each young adult to learn how to express themselves and a chance of a more independent life. All this is made possible because of donations to School for Life Romania.

The Foundation not only enables young adults to learn a multitude of new skills, there's a building dedicated to supported living for 4 young adults. They are able to become more independent with the encouragement of the support workers, and enjoy the freedom to live as part of the community. I have been bowled over by the fortitude and consistent dedication of the support workers, special needs teachers and all involved in the running of School for Life, their passion and commitment is outstanding.

I saw first hand where our donations go, and was saddened to learn that it is barely enough to cover all the costs. More donations are desperately needed to continue all the important work in giving young adults their rightful independence and right to learn and become part of their community, to have a better life".

SPV NEWS

- Stefan has left his post as Director of Education, and all his colleagues and the SFL Trustees thank him for his dedication and hard work over many years, and wish him all the very best for the future. Cornelia has taken over his position, and we welcome and congratulate her in her new role.

- The cost of living continues to rise in Romania as the country prepares to embrace the Euro. Petrol and utility prices are equivalent to the UK. Our teachers' salaries are pitifully low compared to unqualified workers in Romania, and a small increase in salary has been agreed to meet the incoming minimum wage stipulations in January 2009. But this is not enough to retain our graduate teachers working with extremely challenging young people. Funding from within



Irina showing her school work! Cornelia oversees Angelica's session and Lenuta, the Teaching Assistant, is at hand to help the young people.

Romania and the EU is desperately sought in order for the project to continue.

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- The new Director of the hospital where the young people live is keen to work closely with Școala Pentru Viață and has asked our teachers to work with the most able children in the Institution who are forgetting their basic literacy and numeracy skills. These young people are a delight to watch- you can't imagine their enthusiasm for classes, their pride at their work books and school bags, and their dedication as they struggle to remember how to add and subtract using their fingers. It makes you realise how we take our education system for granted, how often we resent getting up for school, college and work! These young people are now in their 30s. The Director is keen for them to re-learn the skills they need so that they can go out into the community and practise buying things from shops.

The four young people SFL / SPVsupport to live in the community, all of whom grew up in the Neuropsychiatric Hospital: Viorica, Dana, Lenuta and Rodica.



Viorica and Dana have completed their studies and now work in a local factory earning a good salary. Dana is learning the mandolin and Viorica plays the recorder.



Above: The Teaching Assistants Lenuta and Rodica. Lenuta also cleans for people in the community, and Rodica makes intricate embroidery commissions.

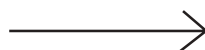


Woodwork and practical activities for the more able young people in the hospital.

There are now workshops in the hospital for the more able young people to participate in. Work on the bags that we will sell in the UK through "Skills for Life", a community interest company, continues! We will keep you updated of their pending availability...

Meanwhile the most able children have been given school bags and books and attend classes with our teacher Angelica, to help them re-learn basic literacy and numeracy skills.

Andrea is so proud of her school bag!



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The plight of the young people in Siret

By Sylvia Gurr, Trustee

I struggled to know where to start this article as the content evokes painful memories. I wanted to provide a snapshot view of one young woman's life across the past 17 years, having worked with her for a couple of years when she was 11 years old. Olga (previously a teacher with Scoala Pentru Viata and now retired) successfully continued to support this child's development.

I chose Cristina as I have a powerful memory of the intensive input, I, and others gave her as volunteers. Over the years on my visits to Siret I have maintained an active interest in her wellbeing and development as a baseline to measure the general conditions of the hospital and the wellbeing of her peers.

Cristina grew up in the neuropsychiatric hospital for over 500 children (aged 3 years old and above) in the early 1990s. At its height in 1986 it housed 1310 children. The majority suffered institutional deprivation, neglect and abuse whilst they lived there. Cristina now lives in an adult neuropsychiatric hospital. Like many of her peers, if she had grown up in a family home she would probably never have needed the support that she now does.

Cristina lived in ward 16 on the top floor of the children's hospital with about 20 - 30 other girls, ages ranging from 10 to 27 years old, with only 12 or 13 beds to share. I can't remember the first time I met her but I remember the first time I entered the ward, or salon as it is called in Romanian. This was a salon for girls which the hospital classed "irrecoverable". The girl's abilities and needs ranged immensely. When I first walked in I was inundated by half naked bodies, hands, shaven scalps and chaos. Limbs and hands pulled me, groped me, pulled my hair, pinched, punched and kicked me. All were desperate for contact. After the initial shock and having composed myself I noticed other girls standing, or sitting, rocking at a distance watching the commotion, occasionally stopping for a second or two only to furiously rock again having witnessed a brief change to the monotony of their daily lives.

After the single carer on duty re-established a level of order and calm (there was generally only one carer in each room of 20 – 30 children), I

noticed more faces peeping out from under beds and tables, behind chairs and in corners away from the more boisterous girls. When they caught my eye they quickly shied away, returning to rocking and beating themselves over and over hidden from sight. Huge, lumpy knarls of skin had hardened under years of punches to their heads and bodies from their own hands, evidencing their self hatred, the trauma and lack of love they had experienced.

Cristina was one of these girls. Cristina did not speak, many didn't.

When I first took her out of her room and into the playroom in the basement of the hospital in February 1992, she crept along a few steps behind me, crouched low, down the four flights of stairs not wanting to hold my hand. Occasionally she stopped and rocked fearfully, wary of my intentions, her trust in others was totally shattered but she still maintained an ability to respond to her deep unconscious need to explore and stimulate her mind and be with others. She followed me and slowly started the long process to overcoming some of her fear.

Other children had lost their ability to even want to try to have any form of contact with another person and would only stop beating themselves for a few seconds to attack those who approached them where they hid under a bed or table, in an eternal state of fear. People were just too frightening. We witnessed the courageous ability of some of these extremely damaged children who over months of intensive work building sensitive, gentle and compassionate relationships with them, they found the courage to maintain a few seconds of eye contact, allowed a smile flicker across their face, or curiously reach out when our heads were turned to feel our hair, quickly retreating in fear if we turned around.

We had a constant battle with the hospital "hairdresser" who would come round every few weeks with one blade and bucket of water, and if available a bar of soap (which wasn't often as food and toiletry supplies were extremely limited at the time). She would pin them into their chairs, flannel water onto their heads and proceed to scrape one child's scalp after the other, re-opening scabs and wounds from her previous

visits and spreading cross infections. Hence volunteer's long hair (even an inch was considered long to a child) was a continual source of interest, envy, curiosity and fascination. Those children who had developed an awareness of their self image were devastated when a few millimetres of growth that they proudly showed off to us was again shaved off by the "hairstylist".

I started seeing Cristina one to one on a daily basis. It took many months for her to begin to trust me and for her to start to have a little fun in our sessions. Resources were minimal in our playroom and generally toys sent as aid were quickly smashed to pieces as the children had no idea how to play with them having never experienced a toy. Toys held no value, but a tiny piece of cotton or string, or a pebble would give a child hours of pleasure as the only thing they could call a belonging of their own, crying in devastation if they lost it, or more usually another more robust child snatched it from them.

Cristina, rather than smashing up the toys, just grabbed as many as possible and clung on to them with all her might, hording them on her lap with her knees bent up into her chest rocking against the wall. Initially it was impossible to even try and show her how to play, so I followed her lead and let her hang onto them being acutely aware of her belief that she would never see anything such as this again. I focused on playfully trying to get her to hold a few seconds of eye contact with me, look in a mirror, or allow me to sit closer to her. She was in constant fear of contact from people. It took many months before she started to trust that on each day that she came to the playroom the toys would still be there before she started to put these toys down, albeit right beside her, to explore each individually. Gradually having started to relax a little she would make quick glances with the occasional smile, shying away again if we made eye contact.

Over time Cristina started to relax a little. In the playground we played a game whereby Cristina started to vocalise noises from her throat and mouth and then look at me intently. Excited by her achievement I mimicked her noises. This progressed into her forming other sounds which were mimicked again. Interspersed with other games we played this most days, her variety of sounds and tones developing. This was further developed by other volunteers, in particular she enjoyed the music sessions!

In the final year I was there before returning to the UK, I organised a walk for the girls down to the river. This always caused chaos in the salon and finding enough shoes, albeit odd ones made into pairs, and some decent clothes for each child to wear was a nightmare! It usually took a good hour or so to sort everyone out. This day Cristina was crouching in a corner rocking. I asked the carer to help me dress her. The carer then informed me that she had to stay behind that day as the doctor had said she wasn't well enough. I knelt down to explain to her and tell her she could come another time, the more able girls crowding around as I spoke. She then held her head up, looked at me and said "si eu vreau", "I want to". There was an immediate ripple of excitement amongst the girls and the carer saying, "Look Cristina spoke!" She then repeated herself again. The first words we had heard her speak in the whole two and a half years I had known her. And to make it even better she had immediate recognition from her peers and the carer in her salon.

This memory will always stay with me.

Olga continued to work with Cristina and her peers after we left. During this time Cristina further developed her language and some of her peers also started to speak too. One young woman called Andrea, who although in a children's hospital was in her late 20's and was extremely damaged by her experiences.

It was an extremely sad time for us all when we returned to the UK, knowing that children such as Cristina and the achievements they had made would probably quickly regress back to persistent rocking, self beating, and the monotony of their daily lives due to the lack of resources in Romania to give each child what they needed start to fulfil their potential and overcome their past. This was the impetus to founding School for Life Romania and Scoala Pentru Viata. But what my experiences have given me is a sense of hope in humanity, as awful as their situation was and the horrific sights we saw on a daily basis, such as watching children so thirsty that they drunk their own and others urine when they found a potty, or the beatings and violence amongst them, I also witnessed

acts of pure generosity, compassion and kindness on a daily basis between these children amongst all the abuse and horror that they lived in. Although many Romanians cared immensely for these children and still do, due to the tough living conditions, lack of resources, and the extreme shortages of essential items for the general population faced at the time, priority was given to their own families rather than the children in the hospital. The financial resources are still needed from the government.

Cristina unfortunately no longer accesses our facilities and hasn't done for several years although she still lives in the adult neuropsychiatric hospital that she was moved to in 2003 and where our students now live. She continued accessing our service for several years after we left in 1994 and then due to changes in provision of resources Scoala Pentru Viata had to make the tough decision to focus the service on some of the other residents of the hospital and therefore Cristina and some others left our service.

Some years on my visits I have seen Cristina looking, what I struggle to say and this is in the context of her surroundings and experiences, content, although still rocking and hitting herself she smiles at contact and will look up willingly. Other years I have found her withdrawn, angry, and fearful, flinching at contact, the atmosphere in the room and her peers also reflecting this. Not so long ago in 2003, I found her limp and lifeless, her head too weak to lift, bones protruding out from under her skin on her limbs, wrists and knees, her cheeks hollowed and bony. In disbelief I saw the others in similar conditions. This propelled our crisis appeal to help with the food shortages in the hospital that had impacted on the residents and the state they had been found in. Thank you all so much for this support. It was an extremely difficult time for us all to witness a repeat of the past on this scale. On more recent visits I have found her fatter and generally looking happier but still lacking a daily activity, subjected to the monotony of the hospital routine and lack of stimulation, this reflected in her continual rocking.

Recent research using MRI Scans on adopted Romanian children in the US, who were institutionalised in Romania from infancy, has shown that the majority of these children have

atrophy of the brain in the orbito-frontal cortex, in other words there is a "black hole" in the social functioning part of the brain, indicating the importance of social contact, interaction and responsiveness during infancy and childhood (Sue Gerhardt, Why Love Matters 2004).

Cristina has a good friend in her room, Paladi. I have always found them close by each other. They do not chat to each other, chase boys, try on clothes or make up. But what they do is provide each other with a deep unspoken awareness and validation of their shared experiences through their mutual rocking, physical closeness and companionship. This relationship has lasted many years and was formed years before I initially arrived in Romania as I remember their warm closeness as children when I first met them in salon 16. I have often wondered if they shared a cot as infants, lying day in day out on a sodden mattress, as I witnessed many others doing, waiting for the few adults around to tend to their needs and finding solace in each other's company when these needs were not responded to.

What I believe our work in Romania has shown is that even with the most traumatic of experiences, given the time, safe relationships and opportunities to socialize and feel valued as individuals, although these individuals may need support for the rest of their lives, many still have the ability to grow and develop and find the courage to gradually overcome some of their fear and show compassion and love for another.



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HELP! WE NEED A MINIBUS!!

Our car is now officially dead. It died this summer and was crushed for scrap. We desperately need a minibus. Please help us with those valuable trips into the countryside that they all love so much...



Please consider using **Quotes4Charity CIC** (Q4C) the next time you, or your friends and family, need help or advice with remortgaging, life cover or home insurance. There's **no fee** to pay, and every time the service is used a donation is generated to charity. With an

average UK remortgage raising in excess of £100, it's a great way to help us while getting the advice you need on your finances. Money raised via Q4C, when you mention our name, is *ring fenced for the minibus* until we have enough and any surplus funds after this will then go to the general running of the project in Romania.



If **just 200 people** used Q4C stating they would like School for Life Romania to receive a donation through them, we could raise **£20,000 towards our minibus!!!** Please tell your friends, neighbours and family about this financial service and ask them to mention us! So far **2 supporters have used Q4C raising £160** for us, with another supporter in the process of using their service...

Miss DB who used their service said,

"Q4C were really helpful when I was buying my flat. As a first time buyer, I needed a lot of help to understand about mortgages and searches and to find a good solicitor, and Q4C provided me with everything I needed to know. I have already recommended them to my friends! It was great to do my bit for charity as well!"

Check out their website for more details www.quotes4charity.co.uk or phone **0845 299 8630**



We have also recently joined **The Giving Machine**, which is similar to **Easyfundraising**, if you shop online via these sites and are signed up as a supporter to School For Life Romania the retailer will donate a % to us!! If you are an online shopper please remember School for Life Romania when you buy your Christmas cards and pressies!!

"The Forgotten" by Will Gould (SFL Trustee), **on sale now!!**

Music inspired by Siret. £10 for a copy of this original album.

So far sales of Will's album have generated **£150** towards School for Life Romania. Maybe make it a Christmas or birthday present for your friends...



You can listen before you decide to buy a copy by placing this link in your search engine

<http://www.soundclick.com/bands/default.cfm?bandID=797688>

All songs written by Will Gould with the exception of the words for "I Hate Balloons" (written by Phil Withington) and Tigancusa a Romanian folk song rearranged for this album. All songs performed by Will, except for Tigancusa, sung by Will and Olivia Gould.

To order your album at £10, please email your enquiries to w.r.gould@leeds.ac.uk

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financial report

by Keith Lownsbrough, Treasurer

The **cash balance** at the end of August stood at £3 281.95. We transferred £9 500 to Romania at the end of August to cover the full budget until the end of December. We also agreed an additional payment of £1 000 to be sent with the next 2 payments to Romania in recognition of the need to increase salaries to meet the minimum wage.

Our **monthly income** of Standing Orders currently stands at £1 600.50 per month.

£540 is received per annum in quarterly or annual payments. Of this, £1 270 per month is given under the **gift aid scheme** giving a minimum tax rebate of £4 298 next year.

cash requirement

projections, in £ sterling:

SPV staff & assistants	13 256
Taxes	7 698
Building costs	3 505
Petrol costs	1 080
Educational Resources	2 430
Other costs	531

Total £28 500

annual income

(less additional fundraising):

Standing orders	19 206
Tax relief	4 298

Total £23 504

We have agreed to send out £9 500 every 4 months whenever possible, with £5 667 minimum with the extra up to £9 500 if we have the money. In this way, we can give a definite level of support, with the emphasis on Romania to find the extra financial support. We can be sure of supporting the lower level, with the higher figure being raised by additional fundraising.

THE CHALLENGE IS TO RAISE OVER £5000 IN THE NEXT 12 MONTHS!

Better still, can we increase our standing orders to cover the budget???

Recent **fund-raisers** include:

£177 Shiptonthorpe Chapel Quiz Night, £280 Alex and Jamie Wedding, £192 William Leith Bakers Shop Collecting Tins (available free from secretary ejkeetley@hotmail.com), £167 Willerby Methodist Wives Group, £302 Carole Grant/Lesley Hunter homemade cards sales, £50 Sancton Methodist Church, £30 Brough Methodist Womens Fellowship, £160 Quotes for Charity (money ring-fenced to purchase vehicle for SPV), £61 Everyclick.com, £64 Easyfundraising.com, £325 Goodrington Methodist Ladies Coffee Evening, £15 Wimbledon Sewing Machine Company, £250 Talbot Lane (Sheffield) Methodist Ladies, £416 St Bernadettes Church Pangbourne, £74 Total Tribute, £225 Rhythm for Romania, £1068 Dave's Gig at the Gregson, £200 Abu Bakr Islamic School, £40 CAF online donation through website.

THANK YOU, as you can see fundraising is crucial!

School For Life Romania

59 Eastgate, North Newbald, York YO4 3SD Tel: 01430 827010

www.schoolforliferomania.org

info@schoolforliferomania.org

Trustees: Sylvia Gurr, Marianne Lownsbrough, Dave Emptage, Will Gould, Katie Goodier, Phil Keetley.

This newsletter costs £1 per copy to send to you, and is privately funded by a Trustee. Please pass this copy on, or request a pdf version by email from ejkeetley@hotmail.com. You can see past newsletters online at the web address.

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