



Calendar and candles
come at the right time



Smiles and
tears of joy



2,189,832 shoeboxes
sent since 1993



BLYTHSWOODNEWS

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**RARE MOMENT OF
HAPPINESS FOR
FAMILIES IN WINTER
POVERTY**

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Cover story

RARE MOMENT OF HAPPINESS FOR FAMILIES IN WINTER POVERTY



Blythswood Care's 2017 Shoe Box Appeal resulted in 115,932 boxes being sent to eight countries in Eastern Europe and to Pakistan.

A box full of gifts would put a smile on the face of any child but for four-year-old Vince it produced a rare moment of joy.

Poverty and domestic instability are all that he has ever known. He has never met his father but his mother does her best to provide a clean and tidy home for her four children, in Bekes, eastern Hungary.

Shoobox distributor Anikó Somlyai explains: "There is running water and electricity in their town, but after paying the bills many families have nothing left to live on, especially in winter. Many are

jobless and dependent on unemployment and social benefits.

"So your shoebox gifts mean a lot to them. In this town we were able to hand out 320 boxes to families in need."

Blythswood Care's 2017 Shoe Box Appeal resulted in 115,932 boxes being sent to eight countries in Eastern Europe and to Pakistan.

The boxes were filled with practical gifts such as a warm hat, a bar of soap, a packet of sweets – everyday items for people in the UK but unaffordable luxuries for many

who live in poverty. They were contributed by schools, workplaces, churches and individuals from Shetland to Cornwall.

"Often people say to me, 'Why do people make up a shoebox for me?'" says Blythswood's chief executive James Campbell. "And I tell them it's because of the love that people like you, here in the UK, have for those that you don't even know.

"It's such a privilege to be able to deliver them on your behalf. Please fill a shoebox this year and help us bring some happiness to someone in need."



Stefka with her mother. Shoobox distributor Zhani Slavcheva says: "Your kind gifts made their Christmas bright and joyful"

SHOEBOX GIFTS HELP FAMILY HIT BY BENEFIT SANCTIONS IN BULGARIA

The gift of pens, pencils and books in a Blythswood shoebox helped a seven-year-old girl in Bulgaria feel she was ready to go back to school.

It was in early December that a frail woman from the Roma community entered a church in Sliven, seeking help for her daughter. "Stiliana told us that Stefka had been excluded from school because of head lice," says Zhani Slavcheva. "They had no money for treatment and if she didn't attend school, the family would no longer receive

social help from the government.

"I helped her and she disappeared."

At Christmas, Zhani's husband Stoyan, who is pastor of the congregation, was asked to visit a poor family. Zhani went with him, taking boxes from Blythswood's Shoe Box Appeal. "The small house was just one room. We saw a very thin lady lying on the bed and being sick into a basin.

"It was Stiliana! We offered to take her to hospital but she

would not leave her daughter alone. Her fears had come to pass and they had lost their social assistance.

"We prayed for her and gave the family the shoeboxes and explained to them about God's love shown to us in Jesus Christ. Stiliana was groaning but Stefka was excited and full of joy. She is in her first year at school and was so glad to receive some of the things she needed."

Since then, Stiliana has undergone surgery and Stefka has returned to school.

DARINA'S FIRST CHRISTMAS

Bereznyi, Ukraine, 9 January 2018: Darina, aged just three months, is entertained by one of her brothers as they unpack their shoeboxes two days after Christmas by the Orthodox calendar. On her own, their mother is bringing up seven children, the eldest of whom is 12, in a single-roomed dwelling that has neither sanitation nor heating. "The children liked the sweets and the toy cars," reported the distributor. "Their mother was glad to find that they had warm hats."

Last year, Blythswood Care sent 6,886 shoeboxes to Ukraine.



Elderly people such as Silvica see candles as practical aid to help them through a Romanian winter

CALENDAR AND CANDLES COME AT THE RIGHT TIME

"May God bless the person who thought of putting all these nice things in my box!" That was the reaction of Silvica (82) when Paula Croitor presented her with a gift from Blythswood's 2017 Shoe Box Appeal.

"The household candles were appreciated because she can

save on energy using them," Paula explains. "She was pleased to receive handkerchiefs, socks and some moisturising hand cream."

Paula notes that older people especially appreciate the calendar with Bible verses. "They can write in it any appointments that they have," she says.

THANK YOU!

Thanks to your support for summer camps, two thousand young people enjoyed life transforming experiences at camps in Romania, Moldova and Serbia. See camps story in next issue of Blythswood News.





So happy: Luljeta tries on her new hat

BOXES BRING SMILES AT DAY CENTRE IN ALBANIA

Luljeta has a great sense of humour. Presented with a Blythswood box she was more than willing to pose wearing the new hat she found inside. Then she held up the toothbrush and toothpaste and declared 'I need to keep my teeth healthy' before breaking into a perfectly toothless grin.

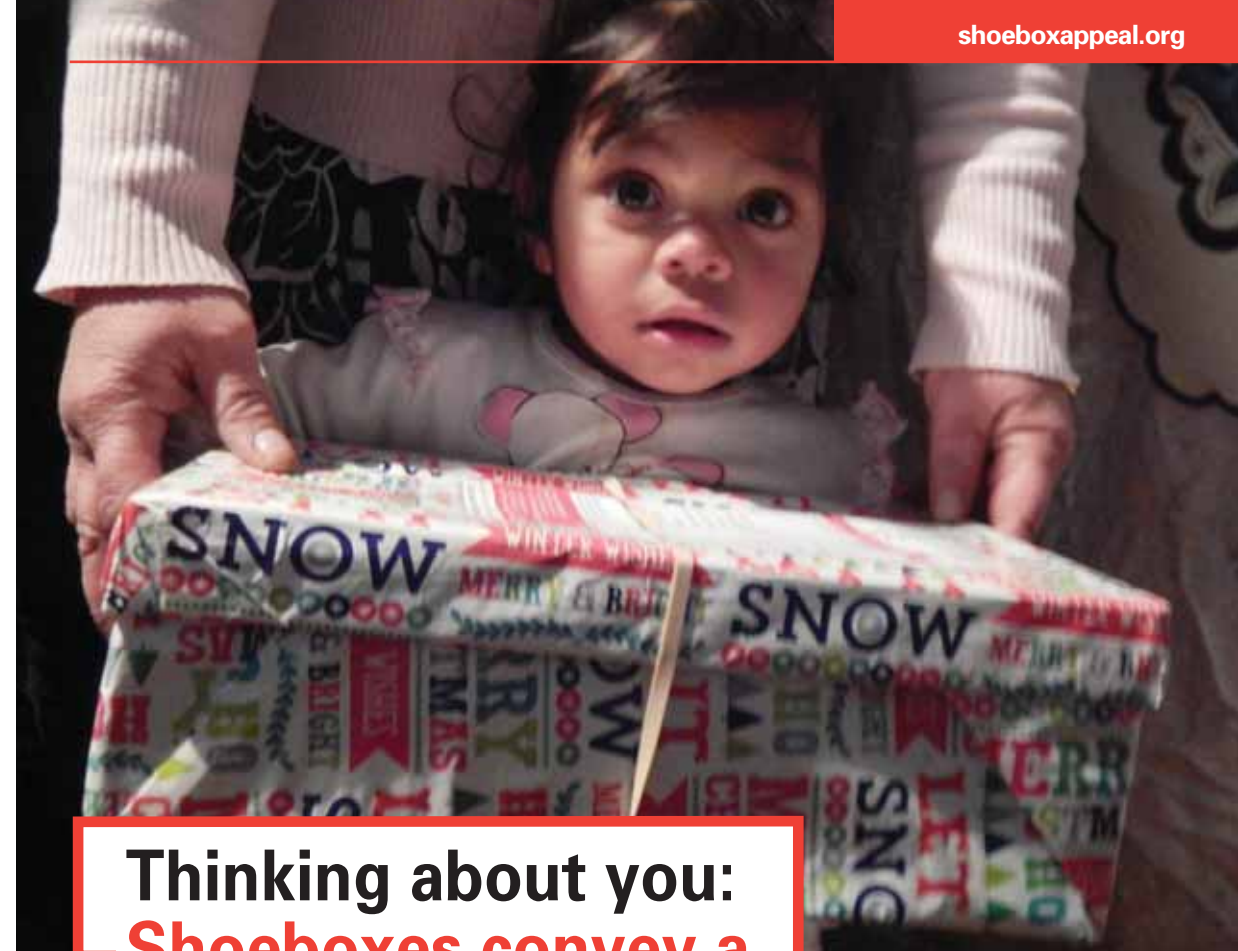
The 40-year-old has been a regular attendee at a social day centre for women and children for many years. There she

learned to read and write through a programme run by Blythswood's partner organisation, Mission Possible Albania.

"Luljeta never ceases to amaze us," says Besa Shaplo who distributed boxes at the day centre before Christmas. "As well as reading and writing, she has learned to paint. A picture by her was among the winners in a competition. She enjoys painting so much."



2,189,832
shooboxes
sent since we began
in 1993



Thinking about you: Shooboxes convey a message of love

What is in the box? Three-year-old Amira is wide-eyed with excitement.

Amira lives with her parents and two brothers and two sisters in a village near Kragujevac, Serbia. Her parents are both unemployed and life for the family is hard.

"The children loved the packets of sweets," says shoebox distributor David Armus. "Their parents were

happiest about the children receiving clothes.

"The most frequent comment here is that these boxes are different from all other aid because of the variety and the quality of the contents.

"What is more important is that these packages convey love. The realisation that someone thinks about you is priceless."

"What is more important is that these packages convey love. The realisation that someone thinks about you is priceless."



*Sergey beams with happiness
to receive a new T-shirt*

YOUR GIFTS HELP BREAK THROUGH SOCIAL ISOLATION

Sergey and his sister Victoria are affected by cerebral palsy. As well as the physical and mental disabilities that result from this condition, they experience social isolation.

"These children almost always stay in the house," says Tanya Shpygunova who delivered shoeboxes to their home in Chernihiv, Ukraine, in December. "They are too heavy for their mother to carry, and they themselves are

self-conscious of their appearance."

Of all the gifts in his shoebox, Sergey was most excited about a Ben & Jerry T-shirt with cows. His sister who is now 15 was delighted to receive jewellery for the first time. "Because of her condition, relatives don't think it's necessary for her to dress up," Tanya says. "But the girl is a girl and she was incredibly happy to get such lovely things in her gift."



*New toys thrill younger children
like Luiza, while her older sisters were pleased to receive
pens and notebooks they can use at school*

SMILES AND TEARS OF JOY

**Yes, unicorns really do exist!
We know this because
Luiza found one in a
Blythswood shoebox.**

And it's obvious from her smile that she was thrilled to bits. "The little ones were happy most of all with the ponies and dolls they found in the boxes," reported Boghian Ggiorghita who runs an organisation that helps families affected by visual impairment in Suceava, Romania.

"Her older sisters were pleased

to receive colourful scarves and stationery supplies for school."

The family of eleven live in an old house with a broken roof that leaks badly in the rain. In these damp conditions, some of the children have developed health problems.

"Their parents have no stable income," Boghian says. "They live off the animals that they raise around their home."

"I would like to thank you for all the work you put in to the Shoe Box Appeal. Each year as we deliver the boxes to these families, we are repaid with smiles and sometimes even with tears of joy."

*Your gifts of
toys and
everyday
things bring
smiles and
tears of joy!*





Christina loves to read

NOTHING BEATS A GOOD BOOK!

Christina is better-off than the other children in her class. She has nice clothes. She has food to eat. She even has a mobile phone.

But she doesn't have her mum and dad at home. Like many young adults from Moldova, they are working in faraway Italy, leaving granny to look after their daughter.

When Christina was given a shoebox, along with the other

children in her class, the gift that grabbed her attention was the book *Jesus the Promised Child*. The 12-year-old loves to read books.

Each year, Blythswood Care includes in each shoebox a Bible storybook for children, a booklet for teens, or a calendar with Bible verses for adults. These items are produced in seven languages – Albanian, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Romanian, Serbian and Ukrainian.

In last year's booklet for teens, Blythswood's Romania director Balazs Csiszer shared his story of growing up in Ceausescu's Romania, serving in the army and becoming a Christian.

This year's booklet *Eternity and You* tells how a schoolboy in Yugoslavia grew up with spiritual questions in his mind that were not resolved until he became a Christian. For younger readers, *Jesus Is Alive* recounts the Easter story.

"The reaction of young people like Christina reminds us that none of us can live by bread alone," says Finlay Mackenzie, Blythswood's head of projects. "Even having a mobile phone isn't enough."

"We believe the gospel is for everyone. We aim to share it in ways that are readable and relevant."



GIFTS FOR HOMELESS MEN IN FORMER MINING TOWN

Emil, Catalin, Francisc, Liviu and Nelu are homeless, living on the streets of Comanesti, a former mining town in Bacau County, eastern Romania. Adrian Barzu presented them with boxes from Blythswood's 2017 Shoe Box Appeal. He says, "Hats, gloves and scarves and shaving things are the most useful gifts for men in their situation."



Sorina was thrilled to discover a suit of pyjamas

TEN-YEAR-OLD IN MOLDOVA RECEIVES HER FIRST PYJAMAS

Can you remember your first ever pair of pyjamas?

Probably not. But the question may help you to understand the difference in living standards between Eastern Europe and the United Kingdom.

Ten-year-old Sorina was thrilled to discover a suit of pyjamas when Blythswood shoeboxes were distributed at her school in Moldova – not because she

needed new pyjamas but because she had never had them before.

"Her parents really appreciated them too," says shoebox distributor Andrei Groza. "Here in Moldova such clothes are very expensive to buy."

By filling a shoebox for Blythswood with basic, everyday items – clothes, toiletries, sweets, stationery

– you are making a real difference to the lives of some of the poorest people in Europe.

Your gifts of everyday items make a real difference.



Angelina and Benjamin liked their pens and notebooks

SHOEBOX GIFTS ENCOURAGE CHILDREN TO GO TO SCHOOL

After four years in Gjakova in Kosovo, Angelina (10) and Benjamin (8) have still not enrolled in school. Their dad moved his wife and six children from a village into the city to give them a better life but his wage as a street sweeper has not been sufficient to lift the family out of poverty.

In her shoebox Angelina was pleased to get a colouring book, notebook and pencils as well as socks and a hat. Her brother too, when asked what he liked best, mentioned the note books as well as toy cars and a shirt.

Pens and pencils are sometimes unaffordable to

families whose children are – or should be – in school. By filling a shoebox with the items on Blythswood's check list, you are putting practical aid into the hands of young people like these.



£1,310,500 received from gifts in wills

from supporters in the last 10 years



Romanian villagers such as Cornel supplement low wages by producing their own food

Most useful gift in a Blythswood shoebox

How do you see to count your hens when you shut them in at night? For a villager in Bukovina, northeast Romania, the challenge became so much easier last winter when he received an extraordinarily useful gift in a Blythswood shoebox.

One thoughtful and generous shoebox contributor had included a hand-powered torch.

Cornel (49) used to undertake seasonal agricultural work in Spain. But he had decided that the extra money was not worth the pain of separation from his wife and children. He missed so many important events and was harvesting oranges far from home when he learned that his wife was expecting again.

Now he has a gardening job in the nearby city of Suceava and supplements his low wage by growing vegetables for his family. He also keeps some hens for eggs and meat.

"A flashlight that I can charge by hand is just wonderful," he says. "Thank you dear friend for thinking about people like myself."



Romania uncovered! Susi Shears, Blythswood's fundraiser in the south of England, travelled to Romania with her family for the first time. Susi says: *Join with me as I share incredible personal stories together with pictures of the people we met.* Go to www.blythswood.org/blog-cezd



FAMILY OF EIGHT RECEIVED CHRISTMAS PRESENTS FOR FIRST TIME

The Mazilu children were amazed by some of the toys and toiletries they discovered in their shoeboxes. "There were things they didn't even know existed," explains Adrian Barzu who delivered the gifts to the family's home in Darmanesti, eastern Romania.

The children's father has difficulty in finding

work and when he does, jobs tend to last for only two or three days at a time.

"When we visited them their electricity had been cut off because they hadn't paid a bill a few months before," Adrian says.

"For these children, this was the first time they had received a Christmas present."

BRING HAPPINESS TO SOMEONE IN NEED THIS CHRISTMAS

Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1 John 4:11)

The wonderful smell of soap – that’s what Emanuela remembers about receiving one of the first Blythswood shoeboxes. And that was 25 years ago!

In Romania last December I got talking to the married mother of two. She told me how much that first shoebox meant to her in 1993. Her mum had died, her dad was depressed and they had lost their home. This amazing box full of gifts was the first present she had ever received.

When you read the stories in this issue of Blythswood News you begin to understand why these boxes are just as significant today as they were back then. Some gifts like Cornel’s hand-powered torch (see page 14) are incredibly useful. Others such as Sorina’s first pyjamas (page 12) will be the stuff of memories in decades to come.

All your gifts – even the most basic – do make a difference. Just think: what would it mean



A child in Ukraine receives a shoebox – see page 4

to you to be given a bar of soap or a new pair of socks or a warm hat if you had no money to buy these things for yourself?

Thank you so much for supporting Blythswood’s Shoe Box Appeal. As a distributor in Serbia observed, your boxes convey love (page 7). The realisation that someone thinks about you really is priceless. Please fill a box for Blythswood and bring some happiness to someone in need this Christmas.



A handwritten signature of James Campbell in black ink.

James Campbell
Chief Executive

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