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BLYTHSWOODNEWS

Number 70 Shoe Box Appeal 2019



**MAKE HIM
SMILE!**

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Make him smile



"I'm three!"

Cover story

"How old are you?"

Amir holds up three fingers to indicate his age. The basic and overcrowded conditions of the Roma camp at Kragujevac, Serbia, are all he has ever known.

Each room is home to an entire family, even one with eight children. Water is carried home in plastic containers. Cooking is done by bottled gas or on a wood-burning stove. The children are enrolled in school but many do not attend. Some of the parents are unable to read or write.

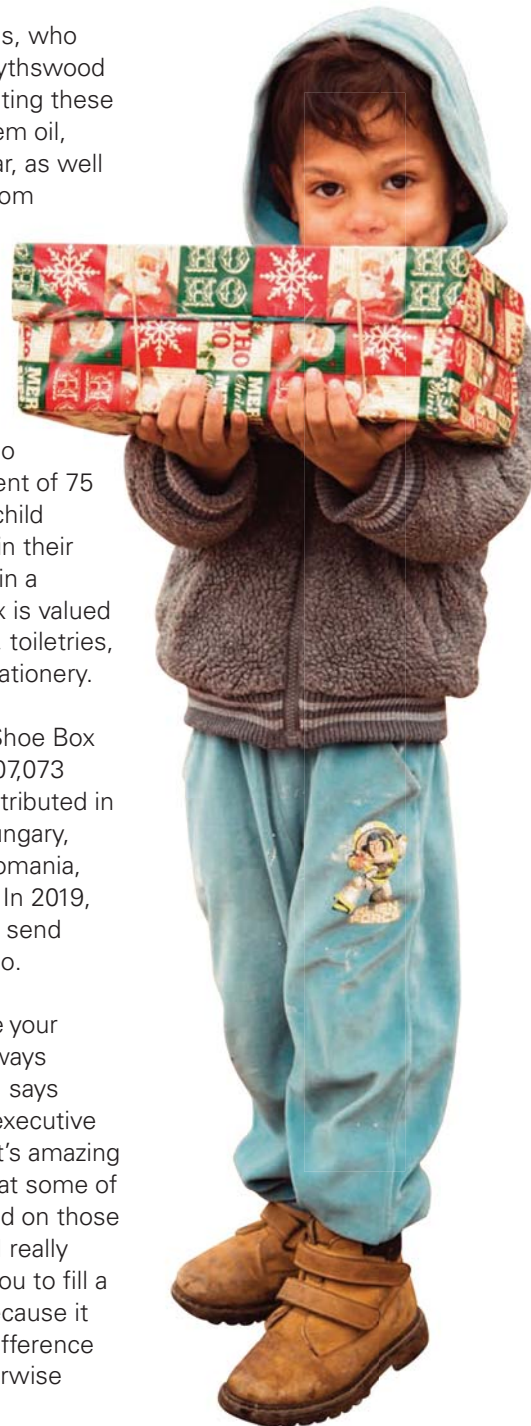
Older members of this community of 70 people can remember what it was like to live on the roadside and then under a bridge after their displacement from Kosovo in 1999. For nearly 20 years,

Pastor Dragisa Armus, who leads the work of Blythswood Serbia, has been visiting these families, bringing them oil, pasta, flour and sugar, as well as gift-filled boxes from Blythswood's annual Shoe Box Appeal.

Today Amir's family survives by collecting scrap metal and plastic for recycling, and also receives the equivalent of 75 euros per month in child benefit. For people in their situation every item in a Blythswood shoebox is valued and useful – clothes, toiletries, sweets, tools and stationery.

Blythswood's 2018 Shoe Box Appeal resulted in 107,073 shoeboxes being distributed in Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Kosovo, Moldova, Romania, Serbia and Ukraine. In 2019, Blythswood plans to send some to Pakistan, too.

"The people we give your shoeboxes to are always immensely grateful," says Blythswood's chief executive James Campbell. "It's amazing to see the impact that some of these boxes have had on those who receive them. I really want to encourage you to fill a shoebox this year because it does make such a difference to lives that are otherwise almost hopeless."



Displaced families touched that you remember them

Esad is thirty years old. When he was a child, his family fled from Kosovo during the Balkan war. Twenty years later he and his wife Amira are bringing up their own children in a camp for displaced people, on the outskirts of the city of Kragujevac, Serbia.

David Armus presented them with gift-filled boxes from Blythswood's Shoe Box Appeal. "They live in very difficult conditions," he says. "There are eight families living in wooden huts, with one small room for each family.

"They all love the hats, scarves



Esad and Amira are touched by your kindness to their family

and gloves. They say that's the most important thing for them to survive the winter. And the children love the sweets.

"Your packages give them strength for living, not only the material things, but the very idea that someone thinks about them."

Shoobox shows Augustin that he is not forgotten

Augustin is a 77-year-old widower from Fodora, a village surrounded by a patchwork of fields in Cluj County, Romania. Without any children or family to take care of him, he really appreciates the assistance he receives from Elpis Foundation, one of Blythswood's Romanian partner organisations. Social workers from Elpis have been visiting him almost daily over the last three years, making sure that he is okay, and occasionally bringing him some groceries and precooked food.

"Every time he receives something he is very happy because it means someone is thinking of him," says Teodora Morar. "It was the same when the social workers paid him a visit and offered him the shoebox.

"Among all the gifts, he especially appreciates the sweets and the toiletries like soap. He also finds the calendar really useful."



Augustin is happy to know that someone is thinking about him



Hungary, December 2018: simple gifts such as a bag of sweets and a soft toy bring a smile to Milan, now an only child

Box brings a smile to boy who lost his brother

Milan is just a boy but he has suffered experiences that would shatter a grown man.

His older brother, disappointed in love and under the influence of alcohol, took his own life. It was Milan who discovered his body.

"Both Milan and his parents are finding it really difficult to deal with the resulting trauma," says Laci Bakacs, who witnessed the young lad's reaction to receiving a shoebox.

"Milan was very glad, not only because of the presents, but because someone had thought about him."



Manuel and Daniela with their mum: they were delighted to receive shoeboxes for the first time

CLASSMATES SHOW KINDNESS TO FAMILY IN NEED

Binoculars! Manuel was fascinated by the unusual gift which he discovered in his Blythwood shoebox.

His sister Daniela was pleased to find a blouse and hat in her box. And these were not the only gifts of clothes she received in December – her classmates had already clubbed together to buy her a pair of trousers and a sweater. Their act of kindness testified to the family's real poverty, even by the standards of Bathore which is one of the poorest districts of Tirana, Albania.

The children's parents are both in poor health and unable to work. They have no money to buy medicine for an older brother who suffers from epilepsy. At just 5,000 Albanian lek (about £36) per month, the family's income is just enough to buy the flour, beans and vegetables which they need to stay alive. They have a fridge which does not work. In December, that does not matter so much as they have no money to keep their heater supplied with gas.

"Your gifts brought them hope last Christmas," says shoebox distributor Besa Shaplo. "When Jesus was born, God chose to give the amazing news to the shepherds, ordinary people faced with ongoing problems in their day-to-day lives, just like this family."



Santi with his mum and Qemal: anxious parents appreciate the joy and excitement that your gifts bring to their children in hospital

A BOY CALLED SANTI

Besa Shaplo witnesses both joy and heartbreak as she delivers Blythwood shoeboxes to a children's hospital in Tirana year after year.

"When we entered Santiljo was having dinner, but when he saw us he stopped eating," Besa says. "His beautiful eyes shone with joy. We had met him the previous Christmas and remembered that he loves football. They call him Santi and he's just four."

"Qemal our driver helped him

open his box while we hear his happy voice saying 'wow, a hat and scarf and gloves' and 'wow, a car and an aeroplane!'" In other wards Besa met with anxious parents, like Alehandro's mum.

"Alehandro's box had lots of nice things," Besa says, "but most special to him were the puppets. He suffered from leukaemia and had been in hospital for 25 days. He had no brothers or sisters. I prayed that God would give his mother strength and hope."

Christmas at Bonus Pastor' therapy centre is organised as a family event



Shoobox speaks of family relationship



Sandor saw the shoebox as an expression of love and care

A Blythswood shoebox has played a special role in a man's recovery from alcoholism.

Sandor, aged 44, received the gift on Christmas Eve, at the therapy centre run by Bonus Pastor Foundation in Ozd, Mures County, Romania. 2018 had been an incredibly difficult year for him. He lost

both his parents to illness, leaving unresolved the issues of family conflict which had contributed to his problem with alcohol.

Working as a farm labourer for low wages in neighbouring Hungary, Sandor had to give up his job, and return empty-handed. He had spent all his money on drink.

"He decided to move in to our therapy centre for six months," says Bonus Pastor worker Eva Lukacs.

"His family problems and his self-blame led him into a deep depression which required medical treatment. But after 10 weeks in hospital, he came back to Ozd in the hope that therapy would change his life and thinking.

"We organise Christmas at the therapy centre as a family event. For many of the men, that's what we are. To Sandor

it was a very special moment when he received the shoebox. He couldn't remember when he had last received a present.

"The shampoo, towel, scarf, toothbrush, toothpaste, soap and sweets were all things that he needed. To us they would just be everyday things but he was delighted. To him, the shoebox was an expression of love and care, the experience of the Father taking care of his own son."



PHOTOS DON'T ALWAYS CAPTURE SMILES

The last three years have been tough for Nicoleta and it shows in her face as she clutches her youngest child to her. Four-year-old John is really too big for carrying around but following the death of his father in a building site accident, the family are exceptionally close and committed to each other.

The older boys help their mother to work her small holding in Suceava County, northeast Romania. Nicoleta has no paid employment. Child benefit and social assistance from the town hall are her only cash income and she has to pay to transport the boys to school in the neighbouring village, 20 kilometres from home.

"Photos don't always capture smiles," says Boghian



Shooboxes are full of practical aid to help families like that of Nicoleta

Ghiorghita who organises the distribution of Blythswood shoeboxes in this remote area. "Everyone enjoys your presents in their own way, often with amazement and wonder.

"Thank you in the name of all the parents you helped. You brought joy into the souls of their children with these wonderful and colourful individual gifts."

LOOK WHAT I'VE FOUND!

Besa Shaplo has been distributing Blythswood shoeboxes in Bathore, Albania since 2002. She believes the benefit of your gifts to families in need is as great as ever.

"Edlira and Elvis were very happy with their boxes because they found a lot of beautiful items inside, such as warm hats, gloves, toys and even things for school. You can feel their happiness as they touch each item and show it to us, as if to say: 'You see? I have a new cap, or a new pack of coloured pencils.'"



SO EXCITED ABOUT THE PRESENTS IN UKRAINE



A little girl grabs her brother with excitement as Blythswood shoeboxes are delivered to their village

home in southwestern Ukraine, near the border with Slovakia. "The family live in one room which is

cold and dirty," says Tanya Shpygunova who visited them on 8 January, the day after Christmas by the Orthodox Church calendar. "The children were so excited about the presents. They really liked the toys, colouring books and pencils."

Nearly 5,000 boxes from Blythswood's 2018 Shoe Box Appeal were distributed in Ukraine, going to low-income families, people with disabilities and special needs, hospital patients, residents of a rehab centre, school children and people displaced from their homes in eastern Ukraine.

Hat, gloves, book treasured by pensioner on a bike



Janos' pension barely covers his basic needs

Shy-looking Janos received his box at a project that regularly provides free fresh bread to elderly people in Hungary. "No matter what the weather is like, he comes on his old bike to pick up his bread," says Erzsi Remenyi. "The hat and gloves from the shoebox are important to him because he can't afford to buy them. He lives on a pension which is hardly enough to cover his basic needs."

Now aged 70, Janos was educated under the communist system and loves to read. "He was especially pleased with the story of Dragisa Armus," says Erzsi, referring to the booklet produced for teenagers in 2018.

In recent years, Blythswood has distributed the stories of people from Romania and Yugoslavia, relating how they became believers in Jesus Christ while growing up in societies that were officially atheist. This year's booklet is *The Lost Boy*, the story of Dumitru Sevastian who grew up in Soviet Ukraine.

Simple gifts are special for family dependent on recycling

Elhame is five years old. Her mum and dad earn a little money by collecting drinks cans and plastic on the streets of Gjakovo, Kosovo, so that their six children do not go hungry.

Imagine what it means for a family living in such poverty for each one of them to receive a box full of useful gifts! "Elhame's favourite things were the hat and gloves," says shoebox distributor Faton Berisha. "And she loved the coloured pens and notebook. Her parents were so pleased to see the children receive clothes that would help to keep them warm in winter.

"They really appreciated the gifts of soap and toiletries as they have no money to buy these things. Stationery items are special for them too because they know their children will need them for school."

Each year Blythswood includes booklets with a Christian message in the appropriate language. *Eternity and You* tells the spiritual journey of a Serb from Kosovo. It's a Christian testimony that bridges the political divisions in the Balkans. "Elhame's parents tell us that they like the book so much," says Faton, who has visited the family again. "They have read it to their children many times."

Elhame's favourite things were the hat and gloves



Children's book changes life of granny in Bulgaria

An elderly widow in Bulgaria became a Christian after reading a children's Bible story book, given to her with a Blythswood shoebox in 2017.

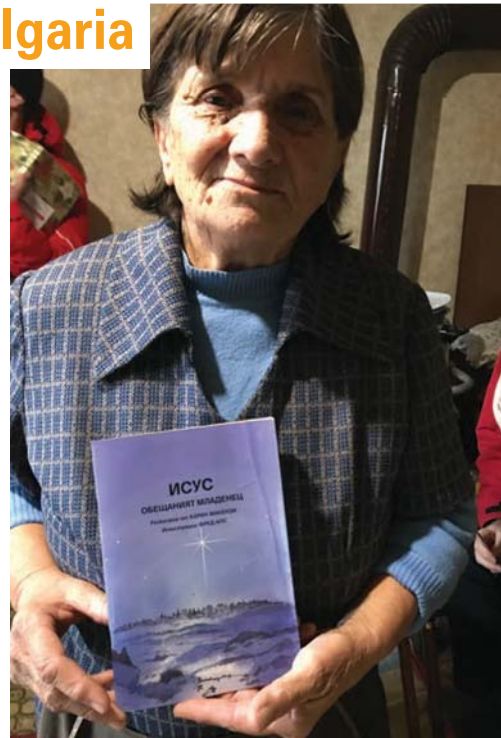
Antona (75) read *Jesus the Promised Child* which simply retells the stories surrounding the birth of Jesus, drawn from the gospels of Matthew and Luke. Filled with a desire to find out more, she went to church, something which she had never done before. "Now she has trusted Jesus as her Saviour," says Blythswood's chief executive

James Campbell who met Antona last winter when he visited her village in the province of Sliven. "Margarita who is one of the pastoral team gives her a lift to church every week, as she is disabled and cannot walk far."

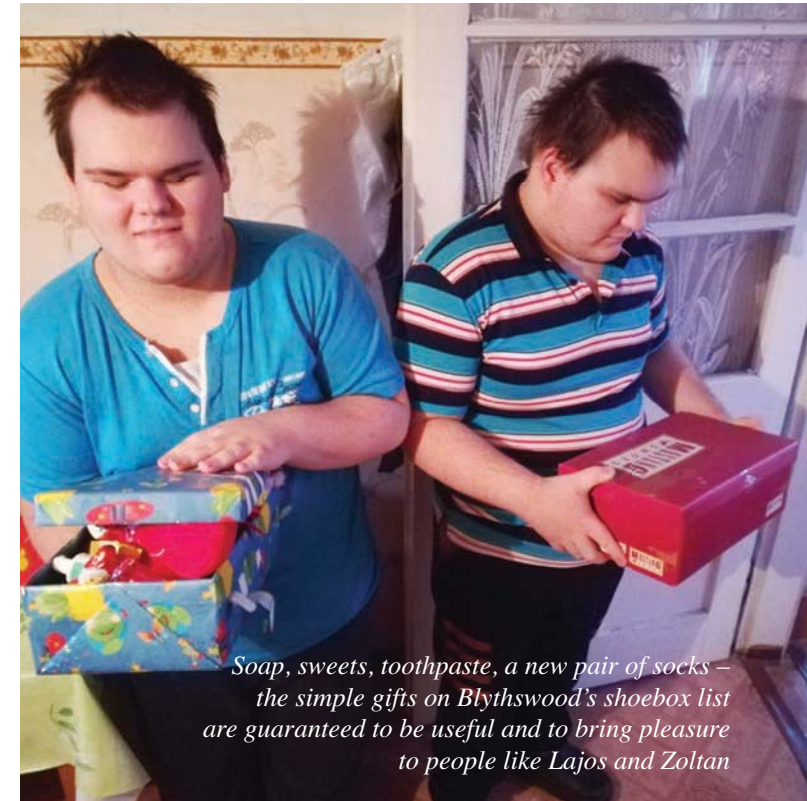
Antona, who lost her husband 11 years previously, faced new challenges in her first year as a Christian. "Her grandson was killed in a car accident and then her daughter-in-law died of sorrow," James says. "Antona's new-found faith has helped her cope with this tragic situation."

Each year, Blythswood produces a Bible story book for children and a booklet with a conversion story for teenagers in six East European languages. This year the book for children is *Daniel the Praying Prince*. For teenagers, *The Lost Boy* tells the story Dumitru Sevastian, a young man in Chisinau, Moldova, who became a Christian in prison.

"Adults read children's books, too," James observes. "These books are for everyone and contain a message that changes lives for good."



Antona became a Christian after reading a Bible story book for children



Soap, sweets, toothpaste, a new pair of socks – the simple gifts on Blythswood's shoebox list are guaranteed to be useful and to bring pleasure to people like Lajos and Zoltan

THANKS TO YOU, HAMA HAS A JOB

Reporting back on Fathers' Day Appeal

Do you remember Hama? When his parents died he was forced to leave his school, in Harare, Zimbabwe, and lost the opportunities that education brings. He says, "Life was terrible. I found it pretty hard to cope."

You generously donated so that Hama could enrol in a sewing training programme, supported by Blythswood Care. With the confidence and skills he gained there, Hama has a brighter future.

He came first in the programme and was offered employment as a tailor. And he has already been promoted.

Hama is so grateful for the support shown to him. "Blythswood Care through Streams of Hope [the sewing programme] changed my life and the way I saw myself. Thank you for believing in me."



Your gifts are transforming the lives of orphans like Hama

The taste, the smell, the touch of kindness

Seventeen-year-old twins Lajos and Zoltan can't see the gifts you sent them. But they can hear what is said by the person delivering the boxes to their village home in Eastern Hungary.

And they can smell the soap, they can feel the toothbrushes, they can taste the sweets. They can understand and appreciate that someone far away has shown them this act of kindness by filling a shoebox for each of them.

When they were little children, the twins could see but by the

age of 14 they had lost their sight completely. Now they attend a group for young people with disabilities, which keeps them occupied during the day.

Living in an area of high unemployment their mother has no paid work while their father can find only casual jobs from time to time. When asked which items they liked best, the parents said they were especially glad to receive toothbrushes and toothpaste but that every item in the boxes proved to be useful.



Irinel with his scarf: Marius says, "All his friends will be jealous of a gift like this!"

Premier League gifts: 'They took each item and enjoyed it'

When Irinel opened his box, the first item he found on top was a hat. His eyes lit up. And he couldn't believe just how many things – useful and practical things – were waiting to be discovered underneath the hat.

But for a teenager interested in football, there was one gift that really stole the show – a Liverpool scarf!

"All his friends will be jealous of a gift like this," laughs Marius Motora, who arranged an event to distribute boxes to young people from two villages in Botoșani County, which is one of the poorer parts of Romania.

"The parents of these children cannot find work," Marius explains. "Their only income is the child allowance of £18 per month and what they can get from rearing livestock and selling cow's milk.

"Our area is known as the poorest in Northern Moldova. You ask me which objects they liked best and I can say they liked them all. As they pulled things out of the box, I saw the joy on their faces. They took each item and enjoyed it.

"Thousands of thanks to those who sent these gifts for poor families."

MOTHER UNDERSTANDS VALUE OF TOYS

Natasha was born in 1971. When she was a year old her mother left her at a hospital in Chisinau, Moldova. She never saw her mother again. Natasha was sent to an orphanage where she remained until she was 18. After that she faced many difficulties. She had nowhere to live and she had serious health problems. Doctors said that she would be unable to have children.

In 2012 the miracle happened. Her daughter Alexandra was born. It was Natasha's happiest day ever. But a short time later the doctors told her that her daughter had Down syndrome. Her husband left her and the hospital advised her to give up her child.

Natasha was resolute. She was not going to abandon her baby.



Alexandra with her shoebox: Natasha is determined that her little girl will never experience abandonment

She was determined that her little girl would not go through what she herself had experienced in the orphanage.

In 2016 Natasha was invited to attend a mothers' group for women who have children with disabilities. Shared experiences

and Christian fellowship continue to make this weekly meeting a source of encouragement and support to Natasha.

Natasha and Alexandra still live in difficult circumstances. She is not able to buy everything that her

daughter needs. They received Blythswood shoeboxes at the mothers' group last Christmas. Both mother and daughter were delighted to find some toys. As Natasha understands only too well, there is no substitute for childhood.



Practical gifts help low income families in northeast Romania

With six children between the ages of two and eight, Cristina certainly has her hands full. There are few opportunities for employment where they live, in Suceava County, northeast Romania, and so her husband is away from home a lot, taking work where he can find it in different parts of Europe.

Calin Croitor distributed shoeboxes to low-income families in the rural village where Cristina lives. "Her children really liked the toy cars, the teddy bears and the pencils," he says. "Everything in the boxes was really practical and useful."

Don't you love to make someone smile?

Time and again I've seen the reaction of children and adults as they discover the gifts that you have so kindly provided for them. Despite the difficulties that they face day-to-day – through poverty, illness, disability or other disadvantage – receiving a shoebox brings such joy that their faces light up with huge smiles.

Be encouraged as you read how your shoeboxes made such a difference last Christmas. Besa Shaplo tells how Santiljo and Alehandro

enjoyed receiving a shoebox at a children's hospital in Albania – and how much anxious parents appreciate what you have done for their children (see page 4).

Think of a fragrance you enjoy: soap, perfume, a favourite food or flower. Taste, touch and smell are important to us all – how much more for Lajos and Zoltan, the teenaged twins from Hungary who have lost their eyesight (page 11). Your gifts bring so much pleasure to people with disability.

And just look at the excitement of the little girl on page 8 as shoeboxes are delivered to her village in Ukraine. Home may be cramped and cold but these children are soon engrossed in the possibilities offered by the colouring books and crayons that you have given.

Fill a box for Blythswood in 2019 and you will be sure to bring a smile this Christmas. Thank you so much for supporting this appeal.



This family in Albania live on £36 per month. "Your gifts brought them hope last Christmas," says shoebox distributor Besa Shaplo. "When Jesus was born, God chose to give the amazing news to the shepherds, ordinary people faced with ongoing problems in their day-to-day lives, just like this family." (See page 5)



James Campbell

James Campbell
Chief Executive

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine on us—so that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. (Psalm 67:1,2)

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