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TK2 gives second chance to boy with disrupted education



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# BLYTHSWOOD NEWS

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*Izaura as a child, concentrating on her homework at Talita Kum*

## Helping children achieve literacy touches the next generation too

**B**lythswood's after-school programme in western Romania first opened its doors in 2001. Seventeen years later many of the first children to enrol in Talita Kum are themselves parents. Izaura, now 24, has a six-year-old son in the reception class at school. As she is able to help

him with his homework, she acknowledges the role that Blythswood played in enabling her to achieve literacy.

Izaura came from one of the poorest Roma families in Jimbolia and faced every disadvantage in her education. Both her parents were illiterate. Seeing little value in education,

they were late in enrolling their children in school.

In the classroom Izaura had to learn a new language, her mother tongue being Romani, and not Romanian. At home there was no-one to help her. Sometimes she missed weeks, even months, of school due to chaotic domestic

circumstances. Her father was abusive, violent towards his children and his neighbours, and spent some time in jail.

In spite of everything, Izaura did well at school. And this she attributes to the help she received at Talita Kum. There she received a cooked meal every day, and had access to hot showers and clean clothes. More than that she had the attention of the social workers and teacher. The result was that the shy and quiet child made steady progress with her school work and learned to read and write well.

Today TK2 extends Talita Kum's winning combination of nutrition and education to children in junior secondary. Without that advantage, Izaura completed just five years at school and, having married at seventeen, has never had paid employment. But with Blythswood's help, these five years were sufficient to transform her life and that of her family.

"Right now Izaura is a homemaker and is focussed on raising her son," says Adrian Popa, whose ambition has been to improve the life chances of the poorest children in his home town of Jimbolia. "She will look for a job when she feels she can manage home and work responsibilities. She knows that without Talita Kum she would not be able to help

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her son Cristian at school now. For this she is really grateful.”

Looking at the wider impact of the programme, Adrian observes that the rate of early school leaving fell from 45% in 2009 to just 1.5% in 2017. “It’s more than just educational achievements,” he adds. “The TK programme actually means better people, that the youngsters who go through the programme really add value to their community.”

*Izaura today, with her son (centre) and her youngest brother: thanks to the educational support she received at Talita Kum, she is now able to help her six-year-old boy with his homework*

## TK2 GIVES SECOND CHANCE TO BOY WITH DISRUPTED EDUCATION

**O**vidiu is 12 years old and still has difficulty in reading and writing, and has no interest in maths. A child like him needs extra help now if he is to be saved from dropping out of school without the basic skills necessary to participate in Romanian society today.

That’s why TK2 is so important. It extends Talita Kum’s after-school programme of nutrition, education and social activities to children of junior secondary age.

This is just what Ovidiu needs. Relationship breakdowns have contributed to an unstable home environment and two years spent away from his home town badly affected his schooling, too.

But now at TK2 he is receiving the one-to-one tuition he needs. “Ovidiu would never complete his homework without assistance,” says Carmen Popa who teaches there. “But he’s a really happy, outgoing child. He loves playing football and taking



*Ovidiu proves that he can both read and write. His tongue-in-cheek note translates as ‘I reached chapter 3, page 38. Don’t steal the book because it will explode’*

part in our theatre workshop.

“He rarely gets upset and never misses a day at TK2.”

And that bodes well for his future. With the attention of teachers and social workers

at TK2 five days a week, he is making progress with his school work and learning to relate well to the young people on the programme. Carmen says: “I’m confident that we can help Ovidiu to make the grade.”

## Equipment and training for firefighters in Serbia



“On this occasion, John focussed on the command and control aspect of the use of breathing apparatus,” says team leader Gary Bennett, commenting on the picture (left). “Here he was giving instruction on entering smoke-filled buildings.

“Our team provided instruction for 40 Serbian firefighters. It’s the most training they would have had since leaving training school. As a result of our visit the local crews are better equipped to deal with house fires, road traffic accidents, and any trauma-related incident.”

Gary’s 15 year partnership with Blythwood Care has seen his teams of volunteers deliver fire engines, ambulances and training to Moldova, Serbia and Romania.

More than 50 vehicles have been provided, with teams of firefighters, mechanics and paramedics volunteering their time and expertise to train hundreds of their counterparts in Europe in the use of new equipment.

This project has grown into the recently formed Scottish Emergency Relief Association. Blythwood’s head of projects Finlay Mackenzie says: “We are very happy to continue our partnership with SERA and looking forward to working together to save lives in Eastern Europe.”

John Campbell is a watch manager with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service in Stornoway. In June he was part of a team of fire professionals who delivered five

fire-engines and an ambulance to Kragujevac, Serbia, and volunteered their expertise to help train local fire crews in the operation of their new equipment.

**Before joining Blythwood’s Daniel Centre, Andrei had applied for jobs as a waiter and as an assistant chef, both without success. “My lack of confidence held me back,” he says.**

It’s a common problem for young people brought up in care, and after 13 years in Romania’s child care system, Andrei was at a disadvantage.

The children’s home where he remained to the unusually late age of 22 enabled him to complete high school and to gain a qualification as an event organiser.

But with 80 children in the home, there was no one to give him the emotional support that is so crucial for a young person’s development.

“There are fewer of us at the Daniel Centre,” he says. “Our group sessions have taught me to



express myself with confidence and have helped me to trust other people.”

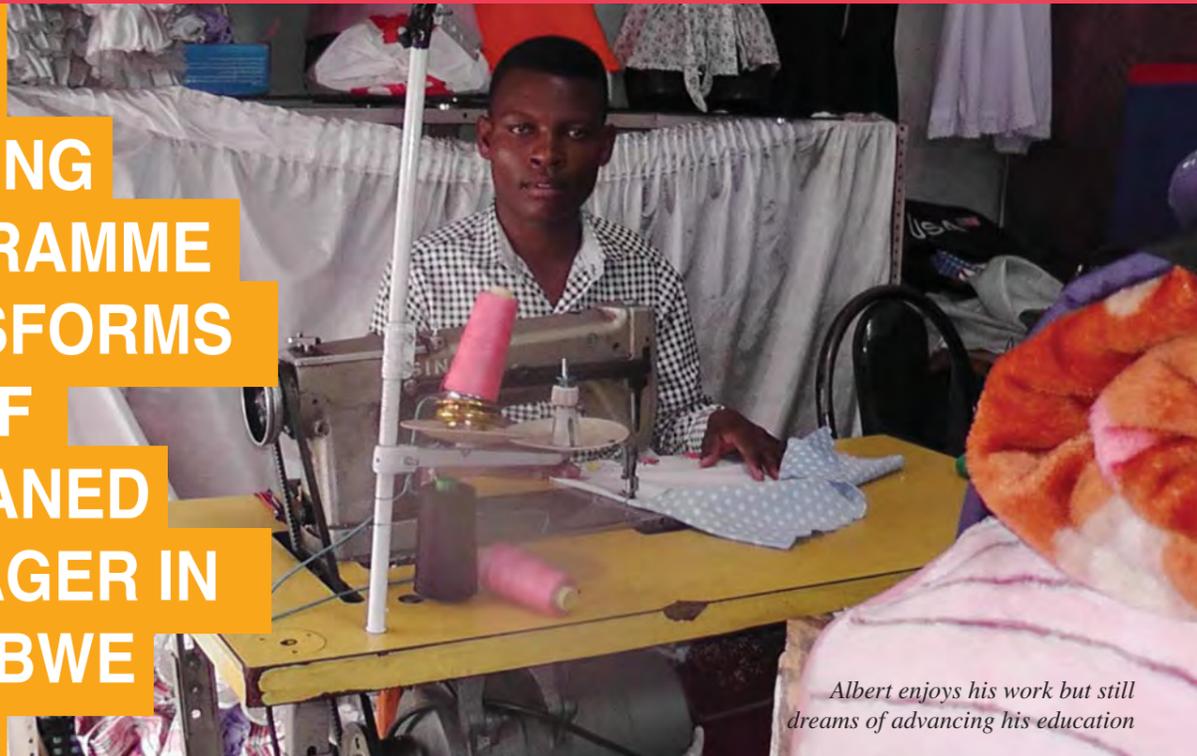
During his first 11 months at Blythwood’s life-skills training centre near Cluj, Andrei benefitted from work experience in the packaging section of a pharmaceutical company. Now he is getting to grips with a new job in a supermarket, weighing fresh fish and dealing with customers face-to-face.

“I’m getting along well with my boss and my colleagues,” he says. “The Daniel Centre programme has helped me to communicate with other people.”

What are his hopes for the future? “I want to save some money so that I can open a restaurant,” he says. “I’d like to see if I can run my own business.”

## DANIEL CENTRE NURTURES CONFIDENCE IN YOUNG MEN BROUGHT UP IN CARE

# TRAINING PROGRAMME TRANSFORMS LIFE OF ORPHANED TEENAGER IN ZIMBABWE



*Albert enjoys his work but still dreams of advancing his education*

Albert's life was shattered five years ago when his father died, and then his mother too, a few months later. The loss of both parents left the 15-year-old boy with a very uncertain future. With no one to support him or pay his school fees he failed his

fourth year exams and had to drop out of school.

But a training programme supported by Blythwood Care has enabled him to get a job, and with his earnings rent a room and start to rebuild his life.

Albert heard about the sewing skills training programme run

by Harare Shelter from former graduates in his community, in Harare, Zimbabwe. He successfully completed the eight month course in 2016 and subsequently was offered employment in a clothing shop, making school uniforms among

other things.

"He enjoys his work and dreams about opening his own sewing shop and employing others," says Stephen Damuputirai, director of Harare Shelter. "He is also keen to re-sit his form four exams."



*Pravallika and her little sister at Dayspring; Blythwood supports the project which provides residential care and education for up to 40 children*

## Vital care for family struck by disaster

Sometimes a difficult situation becomes impossible. The parents of Pravallika struggled to make ends meet but as long as they were both working as day labourers in the fields of Andhra Pradesh, they were able to provide for their family. Their elder daughter started school.

But then the mother contracted tuberculosis and was unable to work. The father struggled to provide alone until disaster struck and he was killed in an accident.

"Our life went into darkness," remembers Pravallika. "Our relatives and neighbours were not good to us and I stopped going to school."

Two years ago, knowing that she could not provide for them, their mother admitted Pravallika, now aged 12, and her sister who is four years younger, to Dayspring House, a Christian care home near Hyderabad.

And the girls are happy. "We love going on the bus to school," says Pravallika. "We like playing with our friends. I want to become a teacher and to take care of my sister and mother."



*Alison White Photography*

*Lorna Dempster at St Michael's Church, Abban Street, which now hosts the Foodbank Centre*

## Foodbank user reassured by volunteers with time to listen

**A** combination of health problems and domestic abuse brought Mairi\* to the lowest point in her life. But as she struggled to cope on a very low budget, her biggest fear was that her children would be taken into care.

"It was the Primary School that referred Mairi to us," says Lorna Dempster,

Blythwood Care's Highland Foodbank Coordinator for Inverness and Nairn. "The volunteers at the Foodbank Centre were able to reassure her that with the support of Social Work and the local school she would be able to keep her family together.

"She was so grateful for the food she received, which gave her something less to

worry about at such a difficult time in her life. Finding someone she could talk to was really important too.

"Many of the people who come in here need someone who is willing to listen to their story, especially when they feel that they are carrying a heavy burden alone."

\*not her real name

**Your gifts to Blythwood's Christmas Appeal are helping people like Mairi**



A monthly food parcel from Blythswood's Basis project helps Iulian to eke out his pension

## GOOD NEIGHBOURS HELP PARALYSED FARMER IN ROMANIA

impaired and unable to help.

But the absence of family support has not prevented Iulian from continuing to do keep some livestock and do things that give him fulfilment. He continues to keep a few chickens and a pig and even has a goat which he leads to pasture each day from his wheelchair.

"He has a positive attitude and is still able to smile," says Sandel Sztas, who runs Blythswood's Basis project, bringing food, clothing and friendship to low-income households in and around the city of Cluj.

"When the social services department referred him to us about three years ago, he was struggling to get by on a disability pension of 500 lei [£95] per month. We are able to

provide him with clothes and with a monthly food parcel that helps to make his pension go further."

Iulian faced an additional crisis when an electrical fault caused a fire in his house, destroying his furniture and even his wheelchair.

"The people from the village jumped to help him," says Sandel. "With their help his home has been rebuilt. A Blythswood supporter bought him a new wheelchair and his neighbours have surfaced the path outside, which allows him to reach the pigsty."

Iulian is a Romanian Orthodox believer and welcomes Sandel's offer to read the Bible and pray with him during his monthly visit. "I only do that when people really want me to," Sandel says.

**A** farmer in Romania, left paralysed by an accident six years ago, is able to stay in his own home thanks to the kindness of neighbours and assistance from Blythswood Care.

Iulian, now 52, suffered the life-changing injury when he was cutting branches and fell from a tree. His wife left him when the permanence of his injury became clear, and his grown-up children are sight-

## THERAPY PROGRAMME IN ROMANIA SEES LIVES RADICALLY CHANGED

**A recovering alcoholic who has been helped by a therapy programme in Romania says that the hardest part of the process was learning to forgive himself for the grief he had caused his own family as a result of his drinking.**

"I can do hard work but in 2016 I lost my job," admits Ferenc, aged 37. "My mother wept and prayed for me and implored me to change but I responded with aggression.

"My wife stayed with me only because she had nowhere else to go with our little girl."

"Eventually I tried to kill myself. Now I thank God that I was taken to hospital in time, and that my life was saved."

In hospital he was visited by a worker from Bonus Pastor

Foundation, which runs a therapy programme with support from Blythswood Care.

Ferenc is a good-natured, friendly person. Discharged from hospital to the therapy centre, he soon became a favourite with others on the programme. "In spite of this, it was difficult to cope with the shame, guilt and remorse I felt when I had to admit how much sorrow and bitterness I had caused to my own loved ones," he says. "How could I forgive myself?"

The Christian faith that underpins BPF's programme was the catalyst for the radical change that he so desperately needed. "My therapy was a process," he says. "An important moment was a conference where I met the



Former clients of Bonus Pastor's therapy programme encourage each other with regular meetings where they and their families share the challenges they face

gracious and loving God, who forgave my sins as well. Since then I read the Bible daily. It is real food for my soul."

Now back at home, Ferenc has found employment again and is mending family relationships. "Since I changed there is peace and calmness in our house," he says. "Even

now, after many months, my mother is still amazed by the change I went through, and is very grateful to God.

"My relationship with my wife has been restored more slowly. She found it difficult to forgive me. My daughter loves me steadfastly and is very attached to me."

## SHOEBOXES DISTRIBUTED IN ROMANIA AND KOSOVO



V is for victory! Pamela looks solemn as she is handed a Blythswood shoebox but her gesture is one widely recognised in Romania as a sign of approval. "She is such a lovely little angel," says Eniko Rozsa. "She was so pleased with the shampoo and sweets. "At the same time I was also able to bring her winter clothes and shoes. I thank God that we are able to do this for her."



Isuf is 56. He lives on the streets of Gjakova, Kosovo. The metal factory in which he worked for 23 years was destroyed in the war of 1999. Since then he has been unemployed. His marriage broke down and he survives by sorting through rubbish, looking for anything of value.

Kajmelina Berisha presented him with a box full of gifts from Blythswood's 2017 Shoe Box Appeal. She says: "The things he liked best were a winter hat and socks."

Blythswood Care's 2017 Shoe Box Appeal resulted in 115,932 boxes being sent to eight countries in Eastern Europe and to Pakistan. Filled with practical gifts such as a warm hat, a bar of soap and a packet of sweets, they were contributed by schools, workplaces, churches and individuals from throughout the United Kingdom.

"I want to say thank you very much to everyone who filled a box and to all the hundreds of volunteers who make this appeal possible each year," says Blythswood's head of projects Finlay Mackenzie. "Your kindness brings real joy to children and adults whose standard of living is very different to our own."



*Daniel (left) held a Guinness World Record for heading a football*



*Sharjeel teaches PE in a junior school: "I never realised how effectively we can make disciples of Jesus Christ through sport"*

## LIFE THROUGH SPORTS IN PAKISTAN

Fourteen sports men and women joined in a three-day event in November to share the challenges and opportunities of being Christians in sport in Pakistan. The High Profile Athletes Camp was held in Islamabad and included players of football, cricket and taekwondo.

Akram Masih from Gujranwala is captain of Pakistan Wapda football team and has played on his country's national team. "It's hard to survive being a Christian player," he admits. "I always feel shy to share my faith with others. But during this camp, the fellowship of other players made me feel that being disciples of Christ we need to

share the good news with others."

Sharjeel played football for the Pakistan Army team for 18 years and now teaches PE in a private junior school in Sialkot. "I love football and have enjoyed coaching young people over the past two years. But before this camp I never realised how effectively we can make disciples of Jesus Christ through sport."

Daniel Gill played professional football for the Pakistan Railway for 15 years and now coaches for a local club in Lahore. "This camp completely changed my outlook," he says. In 2012 he and a friend held the Guinness World Record for



## Hot soup and a kind word for migrants in Serbia

**D**avid Armus manages the supply of essential food aid from Blythswood to people passing through – or stranded in – Serbia's migrant centres.

"I spoke to a woman from Syria who was in the migrant centre with her two little girls. Her husband died in the war, and because she could see no end to the violence at home, she fled with the children.

"Like most migrants from Syria, her aim was to reach Germany. Blythswood Serbia helps people like this by giving them a meal of bread and hot soup, followed by bananas and chocolate. Apart from that, we can only try to encourage them by talking to them in a friendly way."

*Children in a migrant centre: Blythswood has been providing food aid since the summer of 2015*

heading a football 335 times.

"We had a great time," says cricketer Stephen John whose organisation Life Through Sports held the event. "The participants were really encouraged. For most of them it was a new experience to combine Christian fellowship with sports."

## Your help prevents homeless people from losing hope.

**A church-based social programme supported by Blythswood provides food for a homeless pensioner whose pension amounts to just £15 per month.**

Sixty-two year old Nadejda can remember happier times. Her university days when the future looked so bright. Her professional life as director of a kindergarten. Her marriage and the joys of bringing up her own two children.

But life has not been kind to Nadejda. Unable to find work in Moldova, her children moved to Russia for a better life and grew more and more distant from their mother until she lost touch.

Her husband divorced her and, as the flat in which they lived belonged to him, she became homeless.

Her health failed and surgery left her with reduced mobility and dependent on a walking aid.

And that incredibly low pension? With some of the institutions in which she worked having closed, she is unable to prove that she held a job for 15 years. Her entitlement comes to just 335 Moldovan lei.

Valentina Federova is a voluntary worker with Bethany Church, distributing aid from Blythswood to homeless people, many of whom are elderly. "Nadejda is in a difficult situation," she says. "We bring her a hot meal and tell her about Jesus.

"This prevents her from losing hope. She can see that even although her own family have forgotten about her, there are people who believe in Christ and for whom she is important. She is very thankful for your support."



*Lonely and disabled, Nadejda lives in bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless people*

## SAVING VISION IN THAILAND AND MYANMAR

**Blythswood Care supports the work of Mae Tao Clinic**

U Than Hlaing is 50 years old. He has a small shop selling clothes in Mandalay, Myanmar. Two years ago his eyes became inflamed, leading to cataract and glaucoma in both eyes.

His vision deteriorated to the point where he could barely see his fingers in front of his face. It was impossible for him to continue to work.

The concern of U Than Hlaing was not just for himself but for his daughter who suffers from a serious heart problem. With no money coming in he was unable to pay for her treatment.

His doctor suggested he make the 12 hour bus journey to neighbouring Thailand, where the Mae Tao Clinic offers eye treatment to people with nowhere else to turn.

There doctors from the UK brought the inflammation and glaucoma under control before removing the cataract from his right eye.

A week later the surgeon who performed the operation reported: "His vision has improved dramatically and he is due to have the other cataract removed soon.

"He will be able to return to work but will need long-term supervision for the underlying inflammatory condition."



*U Than Hlaing before surgery: an inflammatory condition caused cataracts in both eyes, leaving him almost blind*

# PARABLES OF JESUS OPEN YOUNG HEARTS AT CAMP

Ten-year-old Jovan belongs to a Christian family living in the south of Serbia. Because they are 40 km from the church to which they belong, the boy misses out on companionship and shared experiences with young people from other Christian families.

So a week at summer camp, sponsored by Blythwood Care, was a memorable time of fun and friendship.

“There were children from Christian and non-Christian families,” says camp leader Emanuel Ralevic. “The programme included Bible stories morning and evening and times for sports, artwork and movies during the day. Each evening we had a camp fire.”

“Because it takes place in August before the kids start school again, it remains in their hearts and memory throughout the whole year.”

In 2017, Blythwood supported two other camps for children and teenagers in Serbia, as well as similar events



*Wish You Were Here! Your response to Blythwood's Camps Appeal gave children like Jovan times of fun and friendship as well as real engagement with the teaching of Jesus*

in Romania, Moldova and Bulgaria. One camp for teenagers had as its theme the parables of Jesus – the Good Samaritan, the Unmerciful Servant, the Pearl

of Great Price, the Prodigal Son, the Midnight Visitor and the Unjust Steward.

“We split into small groups of six or seven for discussion,”

reports a leader. “It was a really good time for the children as they could open their hearts and talk and really understand the meaning of the parables.”

## ‘CAN WE PRAY WITH YOU?’

Blythwood Care gives financial support to Inverness Street Pastors. While this ministry addresses the vulnerability of young people whose unwise choices may put them at risk after a night out, it's there for people of all ages, as this report from Sue Hadfield illustrates.

“We said hello to a middle-aged gentleman who was standing outside a pub, having a smoke. Small talk quickly turned into him opening up his heart. He was full of pain since his best friend committed suicide last Christmas. Meeting up with his mates for a couple of pints was his way of taking his

mind off it and getting temporary relief but the pain didn't go away.

“It's worse at this time of year, and harder to deal with. The pain of bereavement, of not knowing what had been happening beneath the surface in the life of his best friend. The pain of ‘what if’ and ‘if only’. The pain of unanswered questions. The pain of blaming himself, of putting on a brave face in front of his mates, of having no-one to talk to.

“We listened and gave him time to unburden himself. We asked if we could pray with him and he said we could. We prayed that he would



experience Jesus, the Prince of Peace, and our God of love and forgiveness.

“Pray that this will be just the first of many encounters which will enable him to forgive himself, and to remember the

friendship and the good times that they had together rather than the pain that now engulfs him. God knows. God understands. God cares. God loves him. God wants to set him free.”



# The day Danilo's ship came in

*Cruise ships calling at Invergordon are staffed by men and women from Asia, Eastern Europe and South and Central America*

**D**anilo\* was a crew member on one of 93 cruise ships to call at the Highland port of Invergordon in 2017. An evangelical Christian from the Philippines, he led an on-board fellowship which met twice a week, late at night.

At the Seafarers' Centre in Invergordon he was delighted to be offered a study Bible that would help him prepare for these meetings during his scarce free time.

He told the Seafarers' Centre volunteers about his home village, where there was only one copy of the Bible. His wife was

a teacher and every morning before class she spent an hour teaching the children a Bible story. Every evening she painstakingly copied out another for the next day.

Even his home church did not have another copy, but yet had sent eight of the congregation to a neighbouring village to plant a church. He explained it like this: “We have nothing but we have the Lord.”

Blythwood Care supports the Seafarers' Centre ministry by providing Bibles and Christian literature in various languages. The day before Danilo's ship docked, 30

English New Testaments had been included by mistake with other items obtained for the Invergordon mission.

But as far as Danilo was concerned, it was no mistake. Presented with the New Testaments for his wife's school, and even with a Children's Bible, he went away rejoicing, saying, “The Lord's promise to us was ‘My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.’”

\*Not his real name



*Ivyizigiro means hope: the Christian radio station broadcasts gospel messages in four languages, transforming the lives of listeners in Burundi and neighbouring countries*

## Gospel message saves man who couldn't afford witch doctor

**Emery is a well-educated young man, brought up in Bujumbura, Burundi's capital city. But when he completed his studies to be a technician, he found himself unable to get a job.**

That was why he contacted a witch doctor who promised him a magic solution to his problems in exchange for money. But Emery didn't have any money and so their meeting was postponed.

Then he happened to tune in to a Christian radio broadcast and that changed everything. "He was confused about what he had heard and afterwards he contacted us for spiritual help," says Delphine Ndayikeza, director of World Outreach Initiatives (WOI). "He made the right choice and committed his life



*Pavel's outlook on life has been changed by gospel music*

## Music with a message changes minds in Serbia

**Pavel Marinkovic is a graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts in Belgrade, Serbia. He plays guitar and enjoys sharing his skills with youngsters at the UMMUS Centre in Kragujevac, a Christian cultural project that receives support from Blythswood Care.**

At first he was attracted by the breadth of the UMMUS programme, which also includes art, photography and poetry, and by its unusual focus on wholesome content.

As he participated in music workshops he learned to use his knowledge and love of music to help other people. "UMMUS has helped me to open up and to share my musical experiences," he says.

And he has been gaining new experiences, too. "My friends there

introduced me to gospel music. I had never had a chance to play that before."

Pavel admits his outlook on life has been changed by the message as much as by the music. He says: "Now I believe in God."

UMMUS describes itself as a cultural centre for artistic and moral development. Its founder, Pastor Dragisa Armus believes that the gospel is relevant to every aspect of life, including the arts.

"Serbia is a country that needs to hear the gospel," he says. "People do not know who Jesus is. We have towns and villages without any gospel. Kragujevac is a city in need of investment, spiritual investment, prayer investment. Please pray for Serbia."

to Jesus. The witch doctor put a lot of pressure on him but after his repentance and salvation, Emery decided to have nothing more to do with him."

Run by WOI with support from Blythswood

Care, Radio Ivyizigiro broadcasts gospel messages and health advice in Kirundi, French, Swahili and English. It touches the lives of listeners in several countries in Africa's Great Lakes Region.

## NEW AREA FUNDRAISER STILL PASSIONATE ABOUT BLYTHSWOOD AFTER 26 YEARS

**"Jackie Ross [Blythswood's late founder and president] used to say that we are here [Romania] for the long run," says a new recruit to Blythswood's fundraising team who is able to give an unusually long perspective on the organisation's work.**

Last summer Rona Matheson became area fundraising manager for the Highlands and Islands and Grampian. She brings to the role some important insights. She first went to Romania in the summer of 1992 where she was to remain for nearly four years as Blythswood's aid coordinator, identifying areas of greatest need and setting up teams to distribute food and clothes.

Her training as a nursery nurse helped her understand the reality and consequences of the shocking conditions she witnessed in the orphanages there. It was Rona's concern for the plight of these children

that led to Blythswood's Daniel Centre being opened in Cluj, to give a home and life-skills training to ex-orphanage boys.

"I went back in 2001 to visit the Centre and was pleased to see boys there who had grown up in some of the poorest orphanage I had visited years before," she recalls. "And the house-parents were the same couple that had helped me learn Romanian."

Rona had become a Christian just a year before she first went to Cluj and was much influenced by the believers she met there. "My faith grew strong because of their dependence on God," she says. "They had very little but they had a great desire to share Jesus. Two worked in hospitals and another in a factory. They were all holding bible studies for their colleagues after work.

"They lived the Bible. They had prayer meetings all the time. I thought that was how Christians



*Rona (right) helped distribute shoeboxes in Serbia before Christmas*

lived, and that it would go on. Looking back now I realise it was a revival, a very special time. They had escaped from communism and were preaching from the rooftops."

More recently Rona has experienced Blythswood from the perspective of a charity shop volunteer, a shop assistant and leader of a team helping to run a children's camp in Moldova.

"In my new role, my aims are to connect again with the churches and to build up support groups," she says. "Blythswood's work is Christian work. It's an opportunity for us as Christians to help our neighbour. We need the churches here to support our work."

Rona can be contacted on 07880 196903 or by email: rona.matheson@blythswood.org

## ALAN MOVES FROM RETAIL TO PROJECTS SUPPORT

**A**lan Swanson can tell you the day he first travelled to Eastern Europe – 31 October 1994. He had gone to Serbia to distribute food hampers and other aid from his church, Harper Memorial in Glasgow, in the aftermath of Yugoslavia's violent breakup. "I went back each year," he says. "I was working for Tesco but I knew about Blythswood and in 2003 I became Blythswood's area retail manager for south Scotland and Northern Ireland."

In 2009 Alan became Blythswood's head of retail and so is well known to the organisation's shop workers around the country. Over the next seven years he managed the development of charity superstores in Inverness and Dingwall and saw Blythswood in Ireland increase its shops from two to eight.

Working for Blythswood enabled him to develop his interest in Serbia, as he returned to the Balkans time and time again, assisting with flood aid and more recently with the migrant crisis.



*Alan led a team of volunteers from Harper Memorial Church in Glasgow to assist at a children's camp in Moldova last summer*

Now in a new role as Head of Project Support, he describes himself as 'being on a learning curve and just at the early stages'. "The last few months I've been busy with

the Shoe Box Appeal and now I'm involved in foodbanks."

Working closely with Finlay Mackenzie, Blythswood's head of projects, Alan has also been working on project profiles, to clarify the organisation's priorities and to provide up-to-date information to fundraisers. "We're working on plans for a community centre in Popesti, Romania," he says. "It will help kids and the elderly too.

"If it wasn't for Blythswood's shops bringing in money we wouldn't be able to do things like this."

Alan also serves on the board of Blythswood Serbia. Under the leadership of Dragisa Armus, the branch is producing a Serbian edition of Christianity Explored, a well-known introduction to basic Christianity. "The gospel is Dragisa's priority," Alan says. "There are some evangelical churches in northern Serbia but very few in the south. The Serbian edition of Christianity Explored is due to be published in 2018."

# FROM BOOTS TO BLYTHSWOOD: ANNE AIMS AT NATIONAL STANDARD



Anne (right) with Viv Mackay, manager of Blythswood's Charity Superstore in Evanton: "My aim is to develop Blythswood as a brand and make it market leader in re-use stores."

Anne Failes enjoyed a successful career in retail, first with Bodyshop and then with Boots, where her most recent role as care services manager involved working with 28 care homes and liaising with health boards and the care inspectorate.

But the loss of both her parents a year ago led her to re-evaluate her work. "Mum passed away on 1st November and then Dad, who had been caring for her, died suddenly just two weeks later.

"God took them away, quickly and together," she says. "It was better for them but it was a shock for me and I needed time to think. The church and the minister were a great support. It was at church that I heard that Blythswood was looking for a retail manager and I thought this is for me."

Anne's husband Martin is a school teacher and they have four children. Describing her experience of joining Blythswood in July, she says it is like a family. "Everybody is welcoming," she says.

As retail manager, Anne provides leadership to the shop managers, staff and volunteers in Blythswood's chain of 25 shops and superstores. "We are aiming to move our shops away from the charity shop look where customers have to rummage through everything," she says. "Our Nairn shop has been refitted and turned around and we've made changes in Broadford too.

"Our staff are being trained to the safety and quality level set by Revolve, Scotland's national re-use quality standard."



## Blythswood Care's board of trustees

Blythswood Care's board of trustees: (left to right) Murray McCheyne, Bruce Smith, Pamela Lyall, David Vardy (chairman), Iain Gillies, Stephen Worgan. Murray, Pamela and Stephen joined the board in 2017.



"We took mosquito nets to families squatting in derelict buildings"

# NEW TRUSTEE BLOWN AWAY BY VISIT TO INDIA

Inverness solicitor Murray McCheyne joined Blythswood's board of trustees in 2017. Blythswood News asked him to say something about his interest in the organisation and especially in its projects in India.

"I first heard of Blythswood when Laura and I were newly married and living in Banff. There was a local collection of goods and I could see that Blythswood was serving God in amazing ways. We filled a shoebox or two and from then on my interest has grown. I finally agreed to become a trustee last year because I see Blythswood as a local charity doing great things worldwide.

"For more than 15 years I had a desire to visit India. When I discovered that James Campbell [Blythswood's chief executive] sometimes travelled there I cornered him at his church and offered to carry his bag the next trip he made.

"The result was a whirlwind tour in 2016 – four places in seven days, connected by internal flights. I was blown away by the culture, by the people we met, by the sights and smells experienced. I went back last year with Laura and with our friends, David and Annette Maclean.

"We spent time with Sam Vadavana [Blythswood's project manager in India] and his wife Asmita, in Mumbai. They visit a Dalit village most days, teaching some English and befriending people whom almost no-one else in society will go near. We took mosquito nets to families squatting in derelict buildings and visited a red light district where 15,000 women and girls are trapped in exploitation.

"Since our visit Sam and Asmita have started a coffee shop where they can befriend these girls and offer them some Christian hope, and also do

something for their children, seeking to break the downward spiral of deprivation.

"Since my return, a friend challenged me, asking me why we should support projects thousands of miles away. For me the answer is simple: today the world is a small place. We read in the Bible that someone asked the Lord Jesus 'Who is my neighbour?' and I am challenged by his answer: 'the one who is in need.' Seeing the example of Sam and Asmita, it's important to me that we help those whom no-one else will help.

"There will always be poverty and unfairness somewhere but that is our opportunity to bring Christian hope and love. We live in challenging times, when there is much fear and uncertainty, but that's exactly where an organisation like Blythswood can be of most service, under God."



# He makes us strong

As I reflect on the year past and look forward to the year ahead, I am humbled by the Lord's faithfulness to us as we seek to serve him. By God's grace, lives are being transformed.

**Education** transforms individuals and families. A training programme has given Albert the skills he needed to find work and rebuild his life (see page 4). Izaura was the first in her family to achieve literacy and now is focussed on the education of her son (front page).

**Community** programmes such as Blythswood's 999

Project improve safety for thousands in some of the poorest parts of Europe (page 2). A Christian therapy programme helped Ferenc to give up alcohol and set him free to rebuild family relationships (page 7).

**The gospel** – printed or broadcast – changes hearts and brings blessings in this world and the next. Read about Emery (page 12) who couldn't afford a witch doctor but found the remedy that's free in Jesus Christ.

Without Christ we are lost. With Christ we are more than conquerors. Because, as the prophet Isaiah said, "He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak

... those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles, they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." (Isaiah 40: 29-31)

I really appreciate your fellowship in this great work.



James Campbell  
Chief Executive



Gjakova, Kosovo, December 2017: Angelina (10) and her brother Benjamin (8) look thrilled to receive gifts from Blythswood's 2017 Shoe Box Appeal. Your kindness brought joy to children and adults in eight countries in Eastern Europe and in Pakistan (see page 8)

## Yes, I do want to support the work of Blythswood Care

Here is my donation of £.....

(please make cheques / CAF vouchers payable to Blythswood Care)

Tick here and make your gift go 25% further with Gift Aid - at no cost to you

Please treat all donations I have made to Blythswood Care for the four years prior to this donation, and all future donations I make, as Gift Aid donations. I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my charitable donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

We also accept donations by (please tick):

Visa  Mastercard  CAF  Charity Card  Switch/Maestro  
or online at [www.blythswood.org](http://www.blythswood.org)

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We love keeping in touch with you, but if you would like to change how you hear from us, simply call us on 01349 830777 or email [info@blythswood.org](mailto:info@blythswood.org)

Funds will be used to help vulnerable children, adults and families and to support many other areas of Blythswood Care's life-transforming work.

Blythswood Care is registered under the Data Protection Act 1998, registration no. Z7689978.



Please return complete form to: Blythswood Care, Deephaven, Evanton, Ross-shire IV16 9XJ  
Tel. 01349 830777 [info@blythswood.org](mailto:info@blythswood.org) [www.blythswood.org](http://www.blythswood.org)

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