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Treasure for Roma children in Ukraine



P5

Mona knows that someone cares for her



P6

Hygiene products give children confidence for school



BLYTHSWOOD NEWS

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Yes, Sofia really is as cold as she looks. There are three months in the year in which temperatures in Kragujevac, Serbia, can drop below minus 20 centigrade. Little wonder then that the seven-year-old's favourite gift in her Blythswood shoebox was a woolly hat.

"It's difficult for this little girl to get to school in the winter," says David Armus who organised distribution of boxes in central Serbia. "She has to walk four kilometres to school because there is no bus service in her village.

"Her parents are unemployed and they really appreciated the gifts of warm clothing for their five children.

"They liked the children's books too. Her father said the whole family would read the book on Samuel."

Last year, Blythswood's Shoe Box Appeal delivered over 121,000 boxes to eight countries in Europe and to Pakistan. Practical gifts such as a warm hat, a new pair of socks and a bar of soap bring comfort and dignity to people in need.

More than that, your gift brings the joy of experiencing a simple act of human kindness, the realisation that somebody cares for you.

Fill a box for Blythswood in 2017 and you can be certain



Woollen hats and other items of warm clothing are especially important to children like Sofia

WOOLLEN HATS PROTECT SCHOOL CHILDREN IN BALKAN WINTER

that your gift really will be appreciated.

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instruction leaflet now or register online at

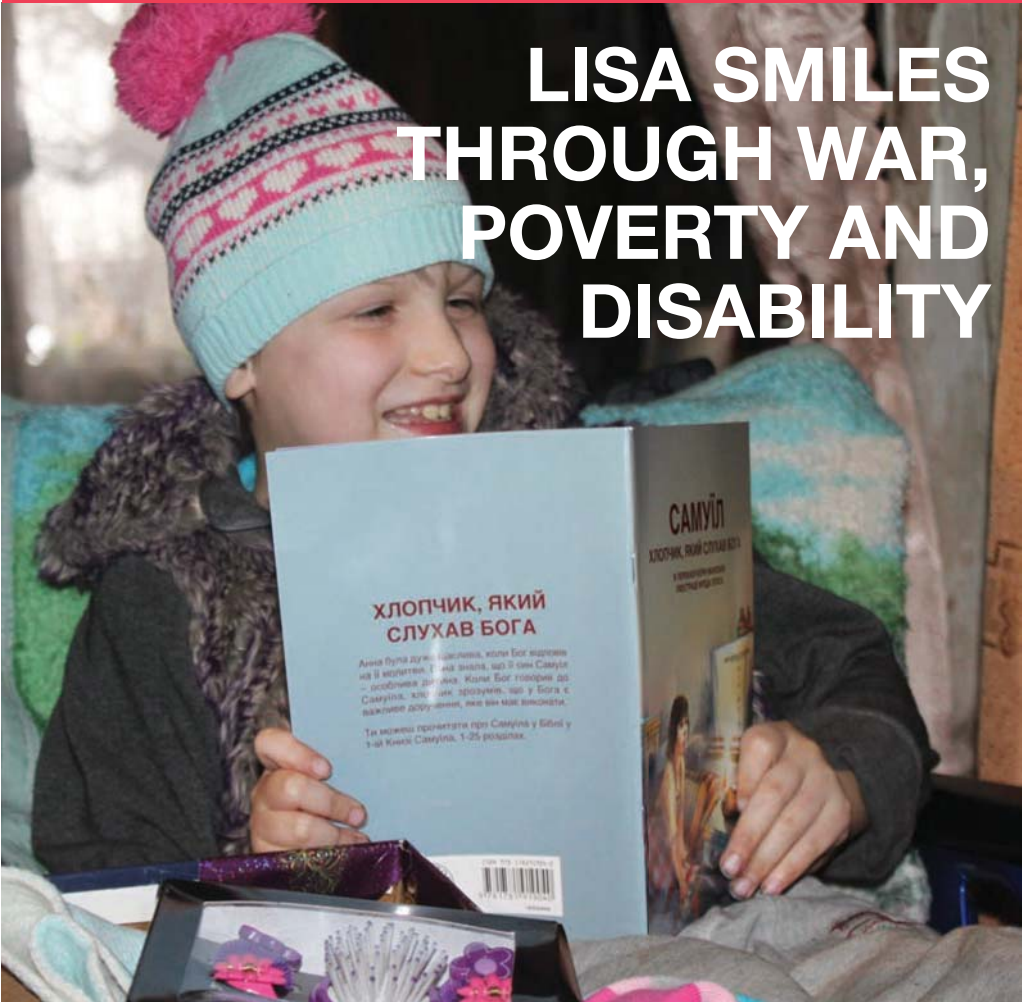
www.shooboxappeal.org.

Make someone happy this Christmas! Order your leaflets with full instructions now – call 01349 830777 or go to shooboxappeal.org



Transforming lives through Christian care for body and soul

LISA SMILES THROUGH WAR, POVERTY AND DISABILITY



Lisa is ten years old. She has cerebral palsy. She sits and moves in a wheelchair. She lives in a war zone in Ukraine. Her family consists of mother, grandparents, uncle and three children. “This family was poor enough before the war, but now their situation is ten times worse,” says Tanya Shpygunova, who called to give them presents from Blythswood’s Shoe Box Appeal.

“Lisa is a wonderful, smiling girl who recited rhymes to entertain her visitors. She was so enthusiastic about everything that was in her box and especially liked a car in her brother’s present. We had something for everyone and they were full of gratitude for this attention and support.”



War-damaged blocks of flats in Ukraine continue to serve as homes for families

Lisa with her picture book, Samuel – the boy who listened. Blythswood includes a Bible-story book for children, a booklet for teenagers or a Scripture calendar for adults in each box going to Europe. In 2016, the organisation celebrated its 50th anniversary by including a copy of John’s Gospel in the appropriate language.



Anya is the eldest of four children. This family was displaced from their home by the war in eastern Ukraine in 2016 and took refuge near Kiev. “When we arrived, the children were shy at first,” says Tanya Shpygunova. “But soon they were enraptured with toys, colouring books, dolls and socks. Their mum thanked us for supporting her family at such a difficult time.”



Brasov County, Romania, Tuesday 13 December 2016: ten-year-old Ionut receives Blythswood Care’s two-millionth shoebox

Blythswood Care delivers its two-millionth shoebox

A ten-year-old boy with special needs, living in a remote village in central Romania, became the two-millionth person to receive a gift box from Blythswood Care’s annual Shoe Box Appeal.

The youngest in a family of nine children, Ionut has Down’s syndrome, requiring his mother to be present with him at the mainstream school which he attends. With his father unable to secure permanent employment in their area, the family depends on social security payments from the Romanian government, which remain very low.

“These boxes of gifts mean so much to families in this situation,” says Blythswood’s chief executive, James Campbell. “Ionut’s mother was so happy that her boy had received a Christmas present.”

The first Blythswood Care Shoe Box Appeal took place in 1993, resulting in 300 boxes being delivered to Romania and Albania. Last year Blythswood sent 121,474 boxes to eight countries in Europe and to Pakistan.

The two-millionth box was one of 8,100 from southwest England, processed by volunteers in Ilminster, Somerset. James Campbell says: “Donors and volunteers from Shetland to Cornwall make Blythswood’s Shoe Box Appeal a success year after year and bring joy to needy people of all ages. Thank you very much indeed.”



Gifts mean more when parents lack work

Florina is 10 years old and her brothers are six and three. They live in a derelict house in Mures County, Romania, without electricity or running water. The family’s one comfort is an old-fashioned ceramic stove in which they burn sticks to keep warm.

“The parents do not have a stable income,” explains Vladimir Popa, project manager with Blythswood Romania. “Roma villagers like these can only hope to find work as casual labourers from time to time.”

“The children really enjoyed their gifts as they contained sweets, toys and colouring books.”

Your shoebox gifts are especially meaningful to children like Florina and her brothers, living in very basic conditions



For these children in western Ukraine, every gift is a treasure

SOMETHING SO BEAUTIFUL

Slavchev, whose husband Stojan had the pleasure of being Santa Claus that day. “We were going to give them Christmas boxes from Blythswood Care and to show them God’s love.

“It was a cold day, and Mariana was dressed in rags but just look at the smile of thanksgiving shining on her face! She was so touched by this act of love and mercy.”

Local gypsy preacher Vasil Antonasov followed up this unplanned encounter with a visit to Mariana’s home and discovered more of her circumstances. As she has no identity card, she does not qualify for social assistance from the state. She survives by looking for food in other people’s rubbish. Her home – without water or heating or a proper window or door – might serve as a hen house, Vasil reckoned, but was not fit for human habitation.

She told Vasil that the unexpected gift had brought her great joy. “Because of the extremely cold weather, she really appreciated the gloves, the hat and the scarves,” he said. “She wondered why somebody far away from her home village would do something so beautiful for her.”

Since then a church in that area has assisted Mariana with food, clothing and heating and fixed the door and window on her shack.



‘But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.’ (Luke 14:13-14)

Sliven Province, Bulgaria, 25 December 2016. Mariana ventured out in the bitter cold to look for fuel. She was returning to her shack with an armful of sticks when a minibus pulled up on the village road and large man jumped out and presented her with a brightly wrapped box.

“We were on our way to visit some disabled children in the Roma community nearby,” says Zhani

TREASURE FOR ROMA CHILDREN IN UKRAINE

Some Roma people in the far west of Ukraine are Hungarian speakers. While Blythswood’s partners in Hungary could distribute every shoebox they receive in their own locality, they make a special effort to take some to these communities across the border, to brighten the lives of some of the poorest families in Europe.

“There are many children in these mud-brick villages,” says Patricia Varga who works with a charity based in Budapest. “Their parents try to find work on a day-to-day basis but unemployment is very high and it’s difficult for them to earn sufficient to feed their families.

“These children were thrilled to receive Christmas boxes. All the gifts inside were considered treasures. They love colouring books, crayons and small toys like cars and dolls.

“Both children and parents really appreciate the personal items of soap and shampoo, shower gels, toothbrushes and toothpaste.

“For them all things are a joy and they wanted us all to know they are so thankful for all the effort that goes into buying, packing and bringing things to them!”

HELP FOR FOREST FAMILIES LIVING ON THE EDGE

Two-year-old Balint beams with happiness as he clutches a boxful of gifts. Small toys and a mug were the objects which grabbed his attention when he delved inside.

But for the adults around him, there are few reasons to smile. Nagycserkesz is a remote forest district in northeast Hungary. Like many others, Balint's parents are unemployed. One of his uncles, whose family lives nearby, is serving a three-year prison sentence for taking home firewood from the forest. Neighbours say he was only picking up what had fallen on the ground but severe new laws are being stringently enforced and another local man is serving four years for a similar offence.

About 70 boxes were distributed to low-income families in this community in mid-December, bringing moments of joy to



Your practical gifts bring joy and comfort to some of the poorest families in Europe.

children like Balint and a great deal of satisfaction to their parents and grandparents, according to Melinda Lőrincz, a representative of ADRA Hungary. "His grandmother was so happy that the little boy received a warm hat and gloves."



‘Your kindness made her feel that she is not alone’

Gloves, headphones, and a teddy bear were among the many gifts that brought a smile to the wan face of Iulia when she opened her present from Blythswood's Shoe Box Appeal.

But there was something more, something less tangible that touched the sensitive nine-year-old. "Your shoebox encouraged her and gave her hope," says Dima Sevastian who helped distribute boxes in southern Moldova. "She lost her mum two years ago. Her dad has a drink problem and Iulia and her two brothers suffer a lot because of that. "Your kindness made her feel that she is not alone."

MONA KNOWS THAT SOMEONE CARES FOR HER

At 85, Mona has the simplicity of a child. In December of 2015 she was given a Blythswood shoebox for the first time. "Then each time we saw her she was asking when shoeboxes would be coming again," says Faton Berisha who distributes boxes in Gjakova, Kosovo.

But even if the box was not a complete surprise, Mona's joy was undiminished. "She was so emotional because she understands that someone cares and is thinking about her," Faton says.

He explains that Mona's monthly pension barely covers the cost of the medicine she needs. To help her buy food, she collects aluminium cans to sell. For this old lady, surviving on the city streets, the most helpful gifts were socks, a scarf, soap and shampoo.



Happy in the knowledge that somebody cares for her: Mona with her box in December 2016

BOX HOLDS DREAM FOR BRICK FACTORY BOY IN PAKISTAN

A car! Okay, it's just a toy car. But for Jahanzeb it represents his dream – to have a car of his own one day.

For a ten-year-old brick factory labourer whose whole family is trapped by debt this is more than just a boy's natural interest in cars. It is a desire for freedom, for respect, for participation in the wider society from which he and his parents and his brother and sister are effectively excluded.

Two years ago, his father borrowed 50,000 rupees to pay for medical treatment for his children. Since then the whole family have worked from dawn to dusk, mixing heavy clay, pushing it into moulds, tipping it out and carrying the bricks to the kiln. Despite their best efforts they are told their debt now stands at 250,000 rupees.

Jahanzeb's mother told the shoebox distributor: "We want our children to go to school and get an education but we have no means to do this. Our children work with us. They cannot go to school. We have to make them work



Jahanzeb lives and works in a brick factory in Punjab province, Pakistan

so that we can repay the loan.

"They want to go to school but they also want to share our burden."

In 2016 Blythswood sent nearly 13,000 shoeboxes to Pakistan, many of which were given to brick factory labourers. For them, a woolly cap is a great blessing when they start work in the cold light of dawn.

Make someone happy this Christmas – see the Shoe Box Appeal video on YouTube





GIFTS SURPRISE
MAN WITH NO
FAMILY

Ozd, Transylvania, 24 December 2016:
Zsolt was taken by surprise

Zsolt did not expect to receive a Christmas present from anyone. His family relationships had all been destroyed. When he was just 18 he killed his own father in a drunken brawl. Ten years in prison did nothing to make him a better person. When he was released he sank deeper into alcoholism. Even his aunt and his older sister who had stood by him for such a long time gave up on him.

Three years ago, he approached Bonus Pastor Foundation, a Christian rehabilitation programme in Romania supported by Blythswood Care. After two of his relapses, his girlfriend walked away. Now he had no one to help him.

Feeling increasingly desperate, he approached Bonus Pastor for a third time in November of last year. That is how he came to be in BPF's drug therapy centre in Ozd, Transylvania, when gifts were distributed from Blythswood's 2016 Shoe Box Appeal.

Programme manager Eva Adorjan says that the gift-filled box really was a surprise for Zsolt. "He was glad of every item – socks, underwear, hat, shampoo, soap. The only exceptions were the toothbrush and toothpaste as he has almost no teeth."



WARM
CLOTHES
CLAD KIDS IN
KOSOVO

Elmadina (left) and her sister Behari live in a wooden shack, near the city of Gjakova, in Kosovo. There are seven children in the family. Their father is unemployed but tries to earn some money by collecting cans and plastic for recycling.

"The girls found toys in their boxes that will keep them happy during this winter," reported Faton Berisha who helped distribute the gifts from Blythswood's Shoe Box Appeal. "For their mother it was really special to see her girls receive new socks and jumpers."

Although the city lies on the same latitude as Dubrovnik, it is situated 1200 feet above sea level causing temperatures to fall below zero during three months of the year with sometimes significant snowfall.



Your practical gifts put
a smile on the faces of
children like Edlira
and her younger
brother, in Albania

Hygiene products give
children confidence for school

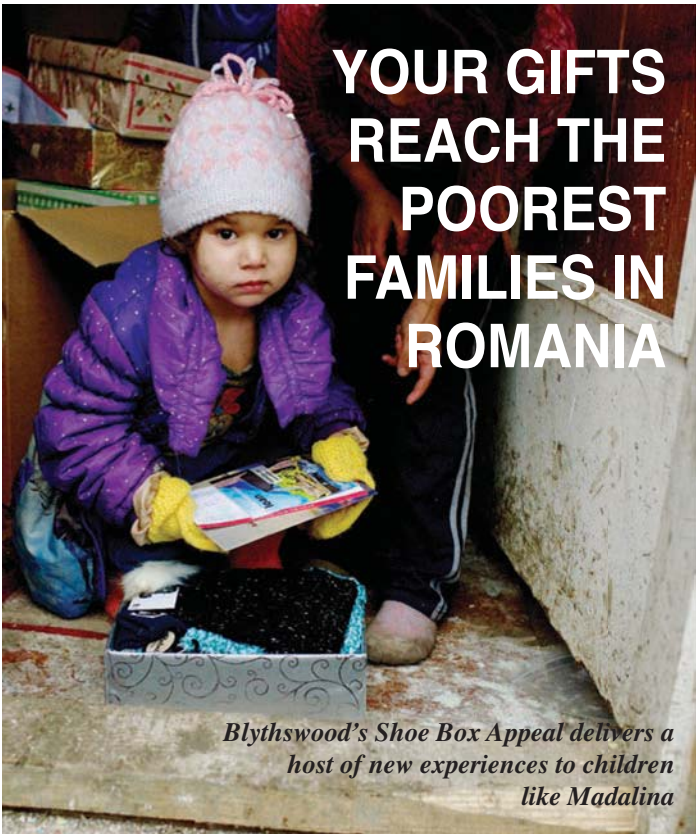
Gifts of shampoo, shower gel, bars of soap and other hygiene products are especially useful to low-income families such as that of nine-year-old Edlira and her younger brother who live in a poor district of Tirana, Albania's capital city.

That's the view of Besa Shaplo who has spent many years running a community development project which

benefits women and children in Bathore.

"Despite her disadvantages in life, Edlira tries really hard to do well at school," Besa says. "And as children get older it's important to their confidence that they can present themselves clean when they mix with others in class."

"Everything in the boxes is helpful to families like these. Parents are always pleased to see their children receive some warm clothes."



YOUR GIFTS
REACH THE
POOREST
FAMILIES IN
ROMANIA

Blythswood's Shoe Box Appeal delivers a
host of new experiences to children
like Madalina

Wary and bemused, Madalina squats in the doorway of her home. Who are these people? And what's in these brightly wrapped boxes that they have brought?

It's December but it doesn't

matter that the door is standing open. The single room has nothing to dispel the cold but the body heat of its occupants – her mother and the six children.

The knitted hat and mitts that Madalina has found in her box

A LITTLE LOVE
FOR THOSE WHO
FEEL LEFT OUT



Dimitri and his four siblings lost their dad two years ago when he died of cancer at the age of just 30. Unfortunately their mum lacks basic life skills and the children would almost certainly have been taken into care were it not for their grandpa. Although he has lost the use of his right arm, he makes providing for these children his priority, doing his best to ensure that they do not go hungry.

Needless to say it was Grandpa who made sure that Dimitri and his sister were taken to an event in their part of Hungary's Southern Great Plain, the day Blythswood shoeboxes were given out to low-income families.

One distributor in the area says: "Your kindness brings unforgettable joy into the lives of people who feel left out. They like to feel respected and accepted. They need to be loved."

A moment of excitement: Dimitri's grandpa made sure the little boy was there the day gifts were distributed from Blythswood's Shoe Box Appeal

Show them that somebody cares



"Your kindness brings unforgettable joy into the lives of people who feel left out."

Doesn't that make it all worthwhile? By filling a shoebox with warm clothes, a few essentials and something a wee bit special, you have both given practical help to people in need and shown them that somebody cares. And that's what really matters to a fatherless child like Dimitri (page 6), to an elderly widow like Mona (page 5) or to a family like Anya's, displaced by war (page 2).

On page 3 you can read about Mariana who ventured out for some firewood on

Christmas Day and, having bumped into Stojan, one of our faithful shoebox distributors, came home with an unexpected gift.

It's difficult to imagine how the poorest people live, even in fast-developing countries within the European Union, far less in the brick factories of Pakistan. But read the stories here and you will see how much they appreciate your kind gifts – clothes for warmth, sweets for energy and toys that stimulate young hands and imaginations.

Will you fill a shoebox in 2017? I promise you it will be greatly appreciated and will bring joy to whoever receives it. Thank you so much for supporting Blythwood Care's Shoe Box Appeal.

James Campbell - Chief Executive



Sliven, Bulgaria: Mariana went out for some firewood and returned home with an unexpected present (see page 3)

***'Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth'
(1 John 3:18).***

Yes, I do want to support Blythwood's 2017 Shoe Box Appeal

Here is my donation of £.....

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

If you can give us your email address, it will allow us to acknowledge your donation without incurring postage costs.

Your email:

☐ 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 Blythwood 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.

giftaid it

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- ☐ Filling a shoebox
- ☐ Volunteering for Blythwood
- ☐ Becoming a Life Transformer
- ☐ Blythwood Care Support Groups
- ☐ Having a speaker at our church/club/school

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@blythwood.org

Resident in Scotland?

Making your Will in September 2017 can help four Christian charities. Go to willreliefsotland.co.uk or call 01349 830777 to find participating solicitors.

Please return completed form to:

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Evanton, Ross-shire, IV16 9XJ
Tel: 01349 830777
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