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BLYTHSWOOD NEWS

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**YOUR GIFTS HELP BELA
MAKE IT TO THE TOP**

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Cover story

NOTHING DAUNTS BELA!

At camp this summer, the eight-year-old seemed unsure at first about the climbing wall. But she was the first to volunteer to have a go and she was the only child to succeed in making it all the way to the top.

A week's holiday at a resort in the Carpathian Mountains was an unimaginable dream for a child from her background. "Bela is one of our most serious cases of poverty," says Carmen Popa, a teacher at Talita Kum, Blythswood's after-school programme in western Romania. "She lives in a single-roomed apartment with her mother and seven siblings. They have no electricity or running water. Her mum is illiterate and unemployed and the family depends completely on social benefits.

"We often see Bela and the younger children wearing dirty clothes and barefoot on the street.

With your support, disadvantaged children like Bela can make it to the top

Camp was a great opportunity to show her how to take care of her personal hygiene, how to have a healthy daily routine, and how to communicate with people from a different country." The Talita Kum camp at Rausor was one of four to be assisted by teams of volunteers from secondary schools in Scotland. "Team games helped Bela to cooperate with the other children," Carmen says, "but it was the craft time that taught her more in terms of patience and listening to others.

"Although at times she seems very wild and strong, we know that deep down she's just a little girl who wants to be loved."



Reporting back on the Summer Camps Appeal - Your gifts benefited nearly 4,000 children

Life skills training for young men brought up in care

Green bean soup with sour cream. Meatballs with mashed potatoes and pickled cucumbers.

On the first Sunday in October, Iulian cooked lunch for those attending the Christianity Explored course at Blythswood's Daniel Centre near Cluj, Romania.

The meal was a tangible expression of Iulian's desire to please others. It also showed just how much he has learned during his time in Blythswood's life-skills programme.

Cooking is something he really enjoys - and something he had little opportunity to learn as he grew up in a succession of care homes and foster families. He has also enjoyed learning to grow vegetables.

Mentoring from the staff team at the Daniel Centre has given Iulian the time-awareness and self-discipline he needs to hold down a job in a furniture factory. Getting up in time for an early-morning shift was not easy, especially at the beginning. So far his employer has not offered specialised training but in spite of a recognised learning difficulty Iulian has proved himself to be a steady worker.



At Blythswood's Daniel Centre, Iulian is learning to look after himself - and others

Looking after money and learning to budget has been one of his biggest challenges. His eagerness to please made him vulnerable to unscrupulous companions who persuaded him to borrow money and give it to them. It has been a hard lesson as

he has struggled to manage the debt and pay it off. But thanks to your support for Blythswood's Daniel Centre programme, Iulian is getting his life back on track and proving that he has the resilience to support himself and live independently.

PRE-SCHOOL HELP FOR DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN IN MOLDOVA



Your support has helped Ruslan develop social skills and make a good start at school

A child from a marginalised community in southern Moldova has made a good start at school thanks to a pre-school programme supported by Blythswood Care.

Ruslan, now aged seven, was born into a Roma family which has no permanent place of residence. But staying with an aunt gave him some stability and enabled him to attend the Profilius project hosted by a Baptist church.

There from the age of five he has received a daily hot meal, clothes and shoes. Volunteers have helped him to socialise, to control his temper and to participate in group activities. Crucially they have given him an introduction to the basics of letters and numbers as well as telling him lots of Bible stories. The result is that when he started school this autumn, he got off to a flying start.

Already he can read and count on his own – an achievement which would have been impossible without two years of good quality kindergarten education.

Development of language skills is especially important for children like Ruslan who has Roma as his mother tongue but is required to learn and communicate in Russian at school.

In September he enjoyed two days of camp designed to help children like Ruslan make friends in the wider, non-Roma community, including families who attend church.

FORMER HIGH SCHOOL PUPIL GRADUATES IN BANKING AND FINANCE

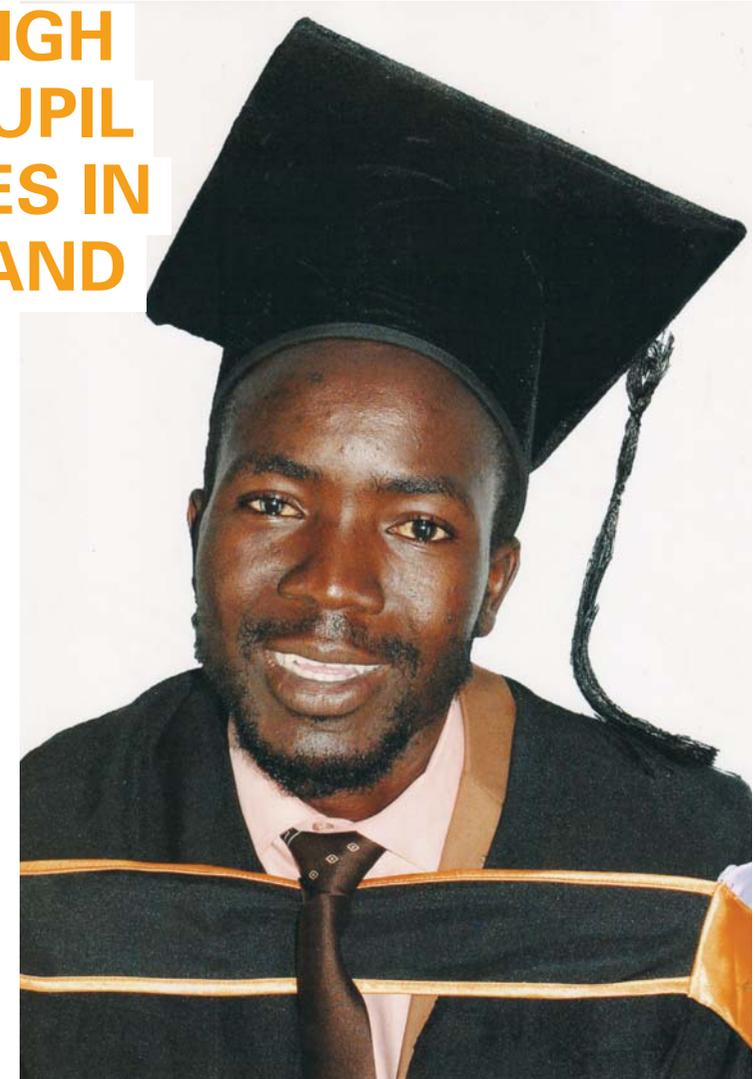
Omega has just graduated from the University of Zimbabwe with a degree in Banking and Finance.

It is a great accomplishment for one of a family of eight children who lost his father when he was just nine years old.

And he couldn't have done it without the support of Blythswood Care who sponsored his school fees for the last two years of his high school education.

Subsequently the United Methodist Church supported him to go to university. Now he is seeking employment in Zimbabwe's financial sector at a time when the country is facing a deepening economic crisis.

As a young widow facing a desperate situation, his mother was one of the first to complete the sewing programme run by Harare Shelter, now Springs of Hope,



Blythswood's support during Omega's high school years was crucial to his success

and went on to secure employment that helped her sustain her family.

In 2019 Blythswood paid school fees for 60 children in Zimbabwe through Streams of Hope, a Zimbabwean charity

directed by Stephen Damuputirai. Stephen says: "Omega has done very well. Blythswood's support for his high-school years was crucial to his success."



Pastor Annie with Srimathi: "At first she was very sad to be separated from us"

Supporting children in foster families

A 15-year-old girl who grew up in a care home supported by Blythswood has made the transition to living with a foster family.

Srimathi was just a toddler when her mother committed suicide. Her father married again but the second wife would not tolerate the children of the first.

Eventually their father entrusted Srimathi and her sister to the children's home run by Siloam Youth and Children's Aid Mission

(SYCAM) in Chennai, India. "She arrived here as a nine-year-old with no interest in her school work," remembers Pastor Annie Milton. "She had gone through such difficult experiences. But we showed her the love of God and provided for all her needs and she started to study well and became so bright."

This year Srimathi faced a new challenge as changing regulations of children's care homes made it necessary to place the children at SYCAM with foster families.

"We spoke to her father's brother," Pastor Annie says. "He happily agreed to take Srimathi and her sister to be with his own family."

"With Blythswood's support we are giving them the help they need for food and education. The girls are safe with that family and their father comes to see them whenever possible. At first Srimathi was very sad to be separated from us but now she is studying well and has freedom to pray and be happy."



SEWING SKILLS COURSE LEADS TO SMALL BUSINESS START-UPS IN ZIMBABWE

Harare, Zimbabwe, 23 November 2019: Nine men and 21 women graduate from the sewing training programme run by Streams of Hope (formerly Harare Shelter for Destitute) with support from Blythswood Care. In the picture, teacher Ms Chiruka (left) and former student and volunteer teacher Mr Courage, examine the work of one of this year's students. "We encourage our students to start their own small business," says Streams of Hope director Stephen Damuputirai. "We teach them to manage and to market as well as to sew."

"We encourage our students to start their own small business"



Your support provides 35 children at Dayspring House with life-changing care, nutrition and education

Health and opportunity restored to boy who lost his mother

Raghuram was malnourished, ill and weak when he was admitted to Dayspring House in 2017. His mother had died some time before and his father was unable to take care of the boy, sometimes leaving him unattended for several days.

Now, a little over two years later, he is a healthy ten-year-old with the energy to play

kho-kho, the complex Indian version of tag.

Raghuram had been enrolled in school at his home village near Hyderabad, but his education had been disrupted by his mother's illness and his father's attempts to obtain hospital treatment for her.

Now he is making steady progress at school, alongside

the other children from Dayspring. He says he would like to be a teacher.

Your support provides 35 children at Dayspring House with the care, nutrition and education that they require to grow, learn and play.

Food aid helps to keep family together

Your gifts have helped prevent children from being taken into care.

National policy in Romania is to keep children in families but this is not always possible.

The Almas family has ten children between the ages of one and 15. Their father is receiving treatment for lung cancer and is unable to work.

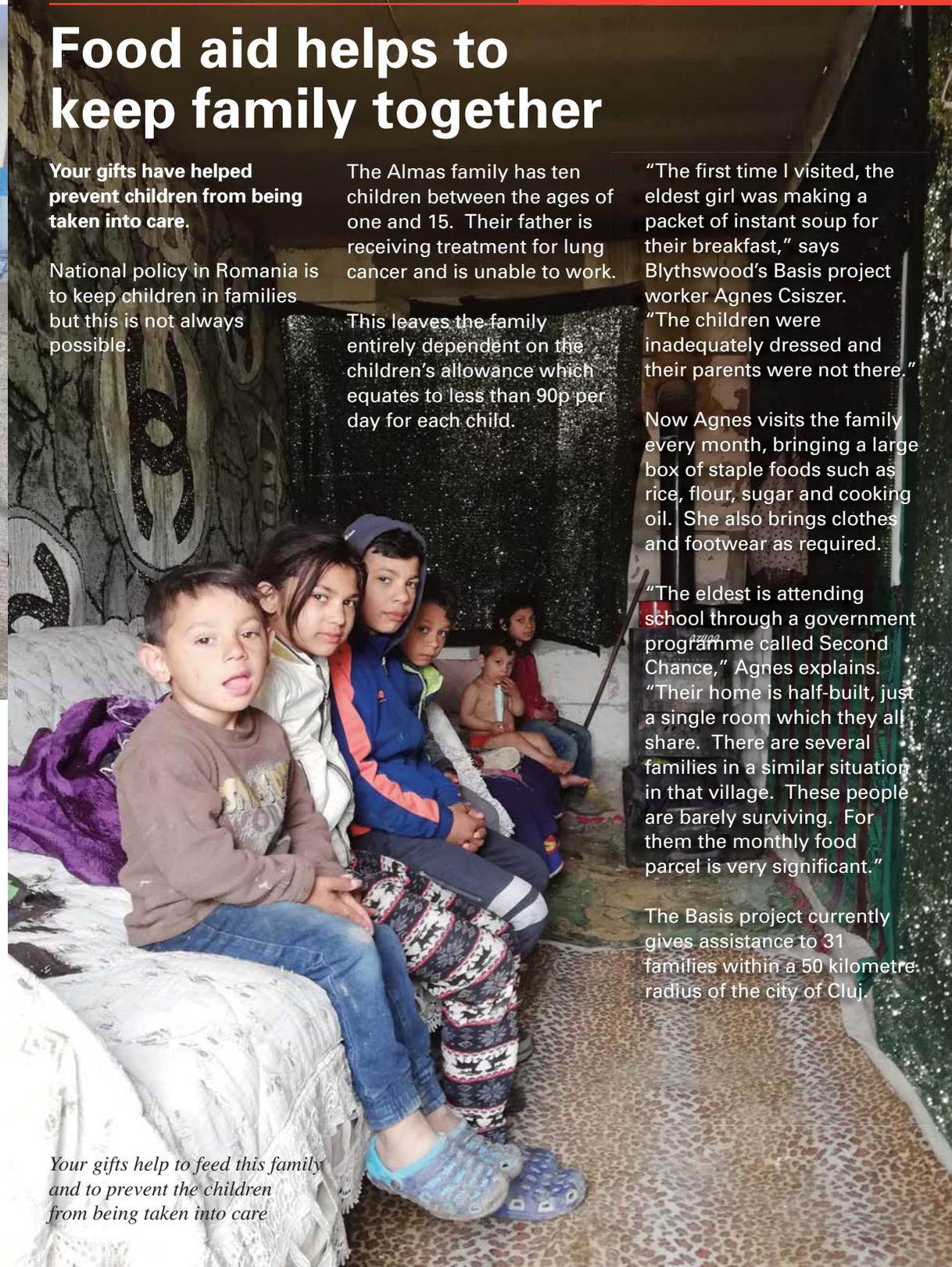
This leaves the family entirely dependent on the children's allowance which equates to less than 90p per day for each child.

"The first time I visited, the eldest girl was making a packet of instant soup for their breakfast," says Blythswood's Basis project worker Agnes Csiszer. "The children were inadequately dressed and their parents were not there."

Now Agnes visits the family every month, bringing a large box of staple foods such as rice, flour, sugar and cooking oil. She also brings clothes and footwear as required.

"The eldest is attending school through a government programme called Second Chance," Agnes explains. "Their home is half-built, just a single room which they all share. There are several families in a similar situation in that village. These people are barely surviving. For them the monthly food parcel is very significant."

The Basis project currently gives assistance to 31 families within a 50 kilometre radius of the city of Cluj.



Your gifts help to feed this family and to prevent the children from being taken into care



'I'm motivated by the thought that if I managed to change, others will manage as well, by God's grace'

Thanking God for sobriety

Feri runs a Bonus Pastor Foundation (BPF) support group in his home town for people affected by harmful addictions. As the group marked its 10th anniversary this year he reflected on how this ministry – which continues to be supported by Blythwood Care – helped him to recovery all these years ago.

My problem began when I started drinking every day. This went on for years. At first it was just a small amount but later I could drink more and more, and I was proud of this. I thought it was normal. After a while, people began to warn me that things weren't

right. Withdrawal symptoms appeared, both in the night and in the morning. I couldn't sleep, I had nightmares, I was shaking and sweating in the morning. Stomach-ache, nausea, confusion and fear filled my days. I hid these symptoms by having another drink.

My health deteriorated. I had diarrhoea, high blood-pressure, tachycardia, and problems with my liver and pancreas. I destroyed our marriage with lies and by not assuming responsibility. I neglected my children and blackmailed my parents. My colleagues were concerned and warned me repeatedly.

In hospital I met a pastor who left me his phone number. My family abandoned me and I was unable to work. My future looked very uncertain. After several days I phoned the pastor, went for an interview and applied to enter BPF's therapy centre at Ozd.

Everything was strange for me. I hadn't known that such a place existed. It was difficult to get used to the new environment. My thoughts wandered to home and family. Twice I nearly gave up and left but the perseverance of the staff and the empathy of my fellow clients kept me there. After many struggles in my soul, finally, one day I surrendered. God's word and the supportive presence of the group changed something in me.

My health improved with each month, helped by the routine of regular meals. I got in touch again with my children, my parents and my boss. When I went home, my children, then in their teens, were a great support. I got my job back. God's Word was my daily food. Our family reunited: my wife and I were reconciled.

Now I'm motivated by the thought that if I managed to change, others will manage as well, by God's grace. I thank God for my sobriety and for entrusting this work to me. I believe in liberation from the power of addiction. I believe in God's love and unending grace. I believe God's Word.

FOODBANK HELPS COUPLE HIT BY LOSS OF HEALTH AND INCOME



File image © Andrey Popov/Shutterstock

When Ron and Shona* turned up at Highland Foodbank, he was on crutches. For six months he had been signed off work because of a condition that affected his mobility. With Ron now reduced to half pay, they were struggling financially after paying a couple of bills. But Ron was still hopeful that he would be fit to return to work at some point.

Two weeks later, Shona was back at Highland Foodbank, this time on her own and clearly very upset. Ron's condition had deteriorated. He had completely lost power in his legs and had no prospect of going back to work.

"For a man in his late 50s who has worked all his life, applying for benefits can be quite an ordeal," says Highland Foodbank manager Lorna Dempster. "For Ron this comes on top of having to come to terms with his loss of mobility.

"It will be several weeks before benefits are in place, so their referral to Highland Foodbank by their GP has been such a relief for this couple. Shona seemed to appreciate being listened to at the Foodbank Centre, and left much brighter than when she came in.

"One volunteer commented to me afterwards: 'It's for people

like Shona and Ron that I volunteer at Foodbank each week.'"

*not their real names

Over 60,000 people fed through our Foodbanks since starting in 2005





Picture TVR Moldova



64 emergency vehicles to four countries in Eastern Europe

PROVIDING EMERGENCY VEHICLES AND TRAINING IN EASTERN EUROPE

A lorry driver who lost control of his vehicle on a bend in Nisporeni, Moldova, owes his life to two kind acts of providence.

There was an excavator working nearby: it was able to raise the lorry from the ditch into which it had fallen cab-first.

And there was emergency cover provided by a fire-engine and crew equipped and trained by Blythswood Care and the Scottish Emergency Rescue Association.

“The excavator lifted the cab enough for the firemen to cut the metal and free the driver from the weight of the engine which was posing a risk to his life.” reported Daniela Ceri. “Just a year ago the firefighters would not have had the right equipment and

expertise to do such a procedure. It would have taken much longer to mount a rescue and find the equipment needed, time that was vital for the survival of the elderly driver.”

In January 2019, the long-running partnership between Blythswood and SERA sent three fire engines to Ukraine, and in September a further two fire engines and two ambulances to Moldova. “Over the past 12 years we’ve sent 64 emergency vehicles to four countries in Eastern Europe,” says Blythswood’s head of projects Finlay Mackenzie. “The team of professional volunteers led by Gary Bennett have done a terrific job in delivery equipment and training.

“Many lives have been saved as a result.”

MARGINAL LIVING AND LEARNING BY LAKE VICTORIA

Mitchel has now reached grade 7 at school. And the only reason she has got this far is thanks to the support of Blythswood Romania.

Her mother would be completely unable to buy a uniform and meet the other costs of sending a 12-year-old child to school. A widow with significant health problems, she does her best to provide for her own four children and for five more from her extended family, orphaned by East Africa’s AIDS epidemic.

A day spent collecting firewood may result in a bundle that sells for five dollars. If she helps the local fishermen to pull a net



Mitchel with her mum: the support of Blythswood Romania has enabled her to reach grade 7 at school

ashore, she may be rewarded with a cup of small fish.

The gift of a cow funded through Blythswood’s gift catalogue has made a significant contribution to the household economy. Despite limited grazing it still manages to produce two litres of milk a day. And cow dung is a valuable resource too, used to plaster the walls of their home.

With support from Blythswood

Romania, Sargy Education Centre is providing primary education and a daily meal to 200 children on Rusinga Island, Lake Victoria, Kenya.

“These children are from very low income families,” says Blythswood Romania’s director Balazs Csiszer who visited Kenya in September. “Without a place at Sargy, these children would remain malnourished and illiterate.”

Weekly visit motivates elderly people to look after themselves

Motivation! It’s something we all need at whatever stage of life we’re at. And for someone in their 80s and on their own it is crucial to their quality of life and even to their survival.

Living alone in a village near the Romanian town of Dej,

Mrs Hermina had nearly given up. She suffers from high blood pressure and other medical problems. Her son is good to her. He pays for her medicines, visits her when he can and phones regularly to keep in touch.

But most of the time the

elderly widow is alone and, like many others in that situation, had given up cooking a meal for herself every day.

That’s why a weekly visit by a social worker from Elpis Foundation has become so important. As well as giving food, toiletries and clothing to



With your support, Elpis offers food and friendship to isolated elderly people such as Mrs Hermina

pensioners on low incomes, the Elpis programme provides vital social contact and Christian friendship and ensures that elderly people have access to medical care. “We have seen Mrs Hermina’s health improve over the past six months,” says social worker Mariana Goja. “Now she cooks for herself more regularly and cleans her home.”



“A 66-year-old former ballerina receives food, clothing and personal encouragement ...”

Reduced to living on the street, Olga is thankful for the food and clothing provided with your support

‘I WAS SICK AND YOU VISITED ME’

A 66-year-old former ballerina receives food, clothing and personal encouragement at a programme to help homeless people in Chisinau, Moldova.

Having trained in St Petersburg as a ballet dancer, Olga went on to perform at the Opera and Ballet Theatre in Moldova’s capital city. During her 23-year career she also served as a dancing teacher and was allocated a two-roomed apartment in Chisinau by the state.

She lost her home in 2008 when a neighbour persuaded her to sign a document which she understood to sell one of her rooms but in law relinquished her right to the flat.

Faced with changed locks and nowhere to go, she rented another room but when her health failed and she could no longer work, her only refuge was the hostel for homeless people, run by the municipality.

There she has received help from volunteer Valentina Federova who visits the hostel every week, bringing clothing and hot food which is provided with support from Blythswood Care.

Olga has been diagnosed with cancer and Valentina is currently helping her with an application to a state-run care home for the elderly. Valentina says: “We hope and pray that Olga will be transferred and that she will soon be living in better conditions.”

Ancient story speaks to the hearts of children today in Pakistan

Raheela is just nine years old but already knows what it is to have family responsibilities.

Her father is a drug addict and doesn’t work. Her mother works for two other families, washing clothes, scrubbing pots and sweeping the floor.

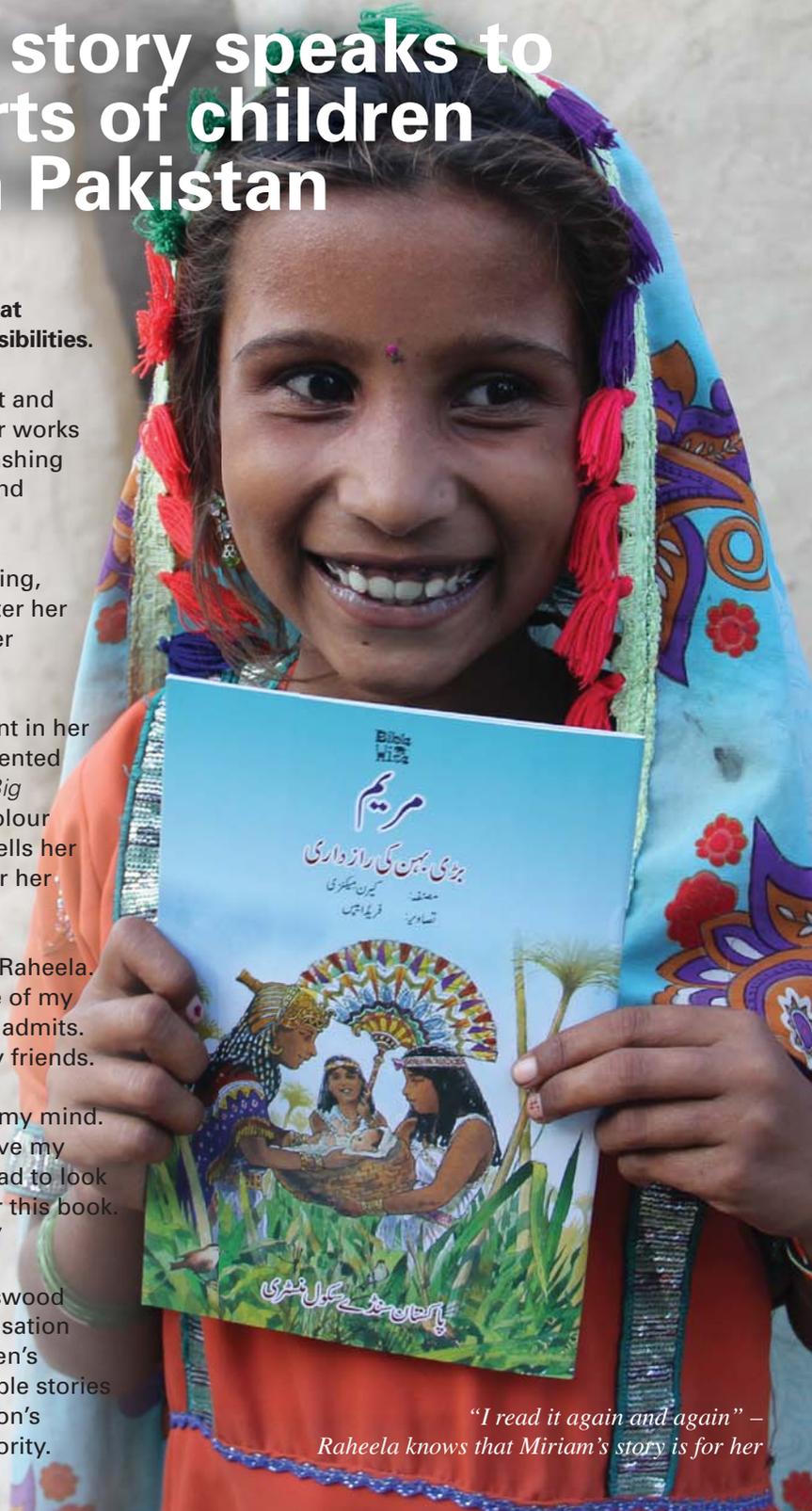
When her mother is working, the little girl must look after her younger brother and sister at home.

At a recent children’s event in her village, Raheela was presented with a book, *Miriam: the Big Sister’s Secret*. The full-colour story in her native Urdu tells her how Miriam watched over her baby brother Moses.

Its relevance isn’t lost on Raheela. “I didn’t want to take care of my brother all the time,” she admits. “I wanted to play with my friends.

“Miriam’s story changed my mind. She loved Moses and I love my brother too. Now I am glad to look after him. I thank God for this book. I read it again and again.”

With your support, Blythswood enables its partner organisation in Pakistan to print children’s books in Urdu, putting Bible stories into the hands of the nation’s persecuted Christian minority.



“I read it again and again” – Raheela knows that Miriam’s story is for her



Based at the head of Lake Tanganyika, Radio Ivyizigiro touches the lives of listeners in four languages

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us

Donarine was a nun for many years. Fervent and dedicated to the religious community in which she lived, she could not have foreseen the change that came over her. One day she heard a gospel message on Radio Ivyizigiro that transformed her understanding of what it is to be a Christian. "She was touched," says Delphine Ndayikeza. "She took to heart what she was hearing and accepted Jesus as her Lord and Saviour."

Having gone through a difficult time, Donarine decided to leave the convent and to commit herself to serve God in new ways.

"She is thankful for Radio Ivyizigiro," Delphine adds. "It was the channel through which knowledge came to her, which helped her to pray and to understand spiritual things. She is thankful to God who transformed her."

Delphine also cites the change that came over Joseph,

an elderly man living in Bujumbura. "Many years ago his brother tried to poison him because of a dispute about a piece of land," she says. "Joseph fled but carried a wound in his heart. He could not forgive his brother.

"Many years later he heard our broadcasts and sought to get in contact with us. He came to our office and we prayed for him. He received the Lord Jesus and decided to forgive his brother and finally found peace in his heart. Forgiveness had been impossible for him but because of the good news of Jesus Christ, he forgave."

Ivyizigiro signifies hope in Swahili. Based in Burundi and run by World Outreach Initiatives with support from Blythswood Care, the station broadcasts gospel messages and health advice in Kirundi, French, Swahili and English, reaching listeners throughout Africa's Great Lakes Region.

"She took to heart what she was hearing and accepted Jesus as her Lord and Saviour."

BIBLE STUDY BRINGS ARTIST TO PERSONAL FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST



Dragan at work: group Bible study at the UMMUS centre has led him to personal faith in Christ

Weekly Bible workshops held in a cultural centre in Serbia have helped an artist come to personal faith in Jesus Christ.

Dragan is a painter in his 40s who took advantage of the facilities offered by the UMMUS Centre, a Christian cultural project supported by Blythswood Care.

"Dragan has been a frequent visitor, attending music and art events," says David Armus. "He appreciated the opportunity to exhibit his own paintings, and to show the public what he can do.

"But what really changed him was the Bible workshops held on Sundays by Pastor Dragisa. We have a small group of about 10 to 15 people. Dragisa circulates a message beforehand, giving the Scripture passage so that we can think about it. When we meet, Dragisa preaches and then leads a discussion.

"One day, Dragan asked if he could share his story with the group. He talked about his difficult childhood and it was a really tough story. He had believed in God for many years but he had never called on

Jesus to come into his life, he had never had a conversion experience until now.

"He became a true believer listening to Dragisa's lectures, realising that God loves him, and that there is hope for every person, even for him."

David adds: "Attention and acceptance is what many people in Serbia lack. That's how the UMMUS centre works to help people with various problems."



Pastor Stojan described the volunteers as angels sent by God in answer to prayer

Irish volunteers transform church in Serbia

A small evangelical church in northwest Serbia has had its place of worship completely renovated by a team of volunteers from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland.

In six working days, 39 people from Northern Ireland, Donegal, Monaghan and Dublin replaced the floor, dry-lined the walls, installed a suspended ceiling and painted the entire building inside and out.

"It was amazing to see the transformation," says volunteer Robert Tait. "We had already sent out money to pay a local firm to replace the roof which was leaking.

"The building had been in a derelict and unusable condition and the congregation of about 30 people had been meeting in a private room.

"Our ages ranged from 13 to 73 and many hadn't met before but God bonded us together, and enabled us to achieve so much in a short time.

"On our last day there, Pastor Stojan was almost overcome when he stood in the pulpit and described us as angels sent by God in answer to a prayer he had been praying for the past 16 years."

Dragisa Armus, president of Blythswood Serbia, tells how the small, struggling congregation in Sremska Mitrovica had helped others in need rather than spending money on their own building.

"During the time of sanctions and high inflation, Pastor Stojan and his late wife Slavica distributed food and clothes to thousands of refugees," he remembers. "They shared the gospel with them and offered them Christian literature. For 30 years they had no opportunity to repair their church.

"The visit of the Go Relief team from Ireland has inspired us all to do mission work with even more zeal. We are greatly encouraged and thankful from our hearts."



BIBLE BRINGS PEACE TO YOUNG CHRISTIAN AT SEA

Cruise ships can have up to 1,500 crew members from different parts of the world

Your gifts enable Blythswood Care to provide the Seafarers' Centre in Invergordon with Bibles, New Testaments and booklets in many languages. Sailors' Society port chaplain Drew Anderson gives an insight into the pastoral needs of men and women at sea.

One morning this summer, during the cruise ship season, a young man came running into our church, crying and very upset. He was so distressed that those on door duty could not understand what he was saying. He was taken through to our hall at the back of the church, where we managed to speak with him when he calmed down.

Joseph* was from Indonesia, where he had been born into a Christian family. He had met a Muslim girl and converted to Islam so that he could marry her. Now they have two young daughters. But his conscience had been bothering him because he had turned away from his Christian upbringing and faith.

Coming ashore from his ship, he was walking along a street, going nowhere in particular, when he came to a corner and was confronted by our church in front of him. Immediately he was convicted of his sin and came running in, crying his eyes out.

We spent time with Joseph, praying and sharing a Bible reading with him. We were

able to give him the Scriptures in his own language and some Christian booklets that he could study later. Cruise ships have huge crews, sometimes as many as 1,500. We introduced Joseph to members of a Christian fellowship from his own vessel and they assured us they would look after him on board and encourage him in his growth as a Christian.

Joseph is due to go home at the end of the year. When he does he is liable to lose his wife and daughters and face hostility from his in-laws.

He will be under pressure to renounce his Christian beliefs. Please pray for him.

*not his real name



Jim volunteers for a wide range of tasks at Blythswood

'BARROW BOY FOR BLYTHSWOOD' JIM COMES BACK FOR MORE

A chance encounter at a football match led Jim Gallie to volunteer for Blythswood Care – and he is still volunteering 27 years later.

"I took my son to see Ross County and met a friend who said he was going to load a lorry for Romania," Jim explains. "I was between jobs at that time and volunteered to help. I ended up spending six months as a barrow boy for Blythswood, manhandling bags of clothes and giving lifts to volunteers. That was in 1992." Originally trained as a chef, Jim spent most of his working life as an industrial radiographer,

carrying out quality inspection on heavy fabrication. His work took him to Italy, the Middle East, Australia and India. He says: "On my travels I saw many unfortunate people and that is what motivates me now."

When Jim retired in 2014 he wasted no time in responding to an appeal on Facebook for volunteers to process boxes for Blythswood's Shoe Box Appeal. Since then Jim has become a year-round volunteer, helping with admin for the appeal and also with reuse and recycling.

"Every shoebox is a smile," he says. "I've seen people that need that kind of help. The other thing that keeps me going is the company, the lovely people I meet."

"Every volunteer has got something to offer. If they enjoy the work, they'll come back and do more."

To find out what you can do for Blythswood, email volunteer@blythswood.org or call 01349 830777.

TEENAGE VOLUNTEER HAS BEEN BLYTHSWOOD SUPPORTER SINCE SHE WAS SIX

When Sarah Oliver joined 13 other young people from Milburn Academy, Inverness, to help run a children's camp in Romania, it wasn't the first time she had done something for Blythswood.

For the year five student had already hit the headlines 11 years previously when she donated all the presents received on her sixth birthday to give to disadvantaged children in Albania.

"I found this trip incredibly rewarding," she said when she returned from two weeks in and around the Romanian town of Dej this summer. "It opened my eyes to many things I take for granted."

"The first week we joined in singing, organised games and crafts and provided hot meals to the kids at camp. During week two we entertained the local elderly community, and spent time with the children at an orphanage. Games and crafts kept us busy but we also bought paint with the money we had raised and redecorated two bedrooms, adding an alphabet and a number train to the younger children's room." Each member of the Milburn team had to raise £500. Sarah held a coffee morning and sold homemade items made by



herself and her granny. Now she is focussed on volunteering in a Blythswood shop as part of the SQA Wider Achievement work for her sixth year in school. "I'm also promoting the Shoe Box Appeal at school," she said. "We are sending boxes to the children we met on our trip."

Sarah is volunteering in Blythswood's Glebe Street shop in Inverness as part of her SQA Wider Achievement

Elma promotes Blythswood in North Scotland

Elma MacKay joined Blythswood Care in April, as community fundraising manager for the north of Scotland, covering the area from Shetland to Dundee. She comes with nearly two decades of experience in fundraising, having worked for Marie Curie, Maggie's, Alzheimer Scotland and Save the Children.

Elma had been aware of Blythswood's Shoe Box Appeal since the mid-90s but admits she has been surprised at just how much the organisation does.

"Blythswood does a lot more than people know about," she says. "Events such as our Sparkle & Glitz evening give us the opportunity to present our projects as well as raising funds."

In October Elma visited some of Blythswood's projects in Romania. "What surprised me is the amount of work we do," she says. "Visiting some homes around Cluj with the Basis project worker made me realise just how difficult some



L to R: Elma MacKay and Fiona Robertson

people's lives can be." Promoting the Shoe Box Appeal in schools and churches and producing a fundraising guidance pack for events have been Elma's main tasks in recent months. Looking ahead to 2020 she is planning a Ben Nevis Challenge for June, restarting Schools Enterprise Challenge in Highland area and is keen to start new fundraising groups, especially in Moray and the North East.

To find out what you can do to raise funds for Blythswood contact Elma on 07876 831175 or email elma.mackay@blythswood.org.

Highland Councillor gets to grips with Blythswood

As digital fundraising officer for Blythswood Care, Fiona Robertson has spent two and a half days a week over the past six months getting to know the organisation and preparing a new website to be launched in the spring.

Although she was aware of Blythswood 20 years ago when her children filled boxes for the Shoe Box Appeal, there have still been plenty surprises. "I hadn't realised that not all employees are Christians," she says.

"It's a wonderful opportunity for staff to hear the Christian message during their day-to-day work. I have also learned the importance of fundraising. This really is an organisation that lives by faith from month to month."

Two years ago she was impressed by the kindness shown by staff to her son who was looking for a volunteering opportunity whilst suffering from adult-onset epilepsy. "During his time at Blythswood, Samuel started reading the Bible more often," she says, "and it was then he became a Christian."

Following graduation from the University of Edinburgh, Fiona worked in London for a publisher, then returned to the Highlands to run a computer training company and went on to serve for 10 years as a development consultant in community projects for Highland Council. "I saw people with difficulties and wanted to do more to help," she says.

That desire led her to give up a job she loved in order to stand for election to Highland Council. There she serves on committees for social care and education. "As a councillor you

can really help people and make a difference," she says.

With another councillor who is also a Christian, she has set up a prayer meeting timed to take place before plenary sessions. "A large number of Highland Councillors are independent," Fiona explains. "I imagine it would be challenging to be a member of a political party because I couldn't vote against my faith. It can be difficult to be a Christian in local politics but not impossible. As long as you're prayerful, it can work."

BLYTHSWOOD TRUSTEES AT THEIR NOVEMBER MEETING IN PERTH

Blythswood trustees at their November meeting in Perth: (from left to right) Carole Gordon, Lorimer Gray, chief executive James Campbell, Murray McCheyne, Pamela Lyall, David Laing, Iain Gillies. Trustee Steven Worgan was unable to attend. Following the retirement from the board of David Vardy, David Laing was appointed chairman. Bruce Smith also retired from the board in 2019.

Retiring chairman David Vardy said: "It has been a pleasure to serve and I appreciate the warmth of fellowship shown to me by fellow trustees, the executive team and staff



members of the charity. I will continue to remember the work in my prayers and

trust the organisation goes from strength to strength."

A story that changes the heart

Christmas 1989 saw a revolution in Romania. Within three weeks, Blythswood had sent its first vanload of aid. That was nearly 30 years ago! Amidst all the changes that have taken place since then, one thing has been constant – the faithful support of people like you.

Your commitment enabled Blythswood to progress from simple aid to long-term educational and community projects. And lives have been transformed as a result.

This issue of Blythswood News tells how your gifts have helped young and old in three continents.

In Moldova your support enables a disadvantaged child to make a confident start at school (see page 4). In Romania a young man brought up in care acquires the life-skills necessary to hold down a job (page 3). In Kenya a fatherless girl has reached grade 7 (page 13). In India a previously malnourished 10-year-old has energy for games and says he wants to be a teacher (page 8).



Your gifts support educational projects in Europe, Africa and Asia, helping disadvantaged young people to overcome the challenges they face

Literacy and numeracy are great achievements that transform lives for good. But it's only the gospel that changes the heart. That remains Blythswood's primary objective today.

In Scotland a young seafarer receives a Bible and finds peace with God (see page 19). In Burundi an elderly man finds grace to forgive a life-long grudge against his brother

(page 16). In Pakistan a little girl reads an old, old story that addresses her own situation at home (page 15).

As I write this we are in the midst of the Shoe Box Appeal. In boxes for teens we are inserting *The Lost Boy*, the story of a young man from Ukraine. Like little Raheela in Pakistan, Dumitru discovered the power of a story from the Bible, impressed on his heart by God's Spirit.

May that be your experience, and mine too, as we read or hear of the coming of Jesus. *The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world* (1 John 4:14). Thank you for all your faithful support in 2019.



James Campbell
Chief Executive

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