



AGENTS OF CHANGE

NEWSLETTER: 018

Winter 2022

Once again . . . we thank you for your amazing donations. We have continued through the pandemic and changed our programmes accordingly. We still work with the most marginalised folk – physically ill and mentally challenged. Desperately poor. Now the Ukrainian refugees also occupy our thoughts and we are doing all we can. We are running the charity on the back of a large legacy from a special friend. We had an appeal for the Ukrainian refugees to which you responded magnificently, exceeding our target of £10,000 to reach £25,000. Many, many thanks! This next year will be very difficult for many – but think of those who have nothing, and the Ukraine refugees who have lost all. We need financial aid because with money we can solve most practical needs, and the rest is down to us all. With blessings and thanks.

Alison Butcher



Meal time in Podriga.

Two ways to go

ROMANIA ↔ UKRAINE

Which way did our charity choose?

After 30 + years of working with the desperate beneficiaries in locked state institutions and at our house in Podriga we managed to do both (thanks to you, our donors and The Lord, through our prayers) and succeeded!

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic we had to close all our projects immediately in early 2020, including our Day Centre at Podriga. Everywhere was under quarantine, and Alison could not visit Romania for over two years.



In the thick of it – Romania.

The Podriga staff went to our local Monastery, St.Trieme, and worked on special projects such as waxing the wood in the church, writing a full inventory, and cooking for vast numbers of folk who attended services outside. Our team worked more than ever expected, and got to know Abbot Mihai very well. During this period he was promoted to being Archimandrite, although he remains committed to grassroots work.

Our team also carried out maintenance and kept the Podriga house clean – but missed the beneficiaries very much. Unable to get access to tell them what had happened to our usual programmes, neither could our team rely on the staff of the institutions to pass on messages truthfully. By the end of the pandemic we knew there was no going back. We would have to make a last visit and say goodbye – which we

did with tears and love and final presents (such as ice cream and juice). We would have gladly continued but the staff of the institutions were determined to use the opportunity to get rid of us. We think they were jealous because the beneficiaries and we loved each other and provided companionship, games, various therapies, and respect for all. More positively, we have seen improvements in the facilities offered by some of the institutions especially a purpose built rehabilitation centre for patients. Having moved on with heavy hearts we decided to develop the relationships which were strengthened during the pandemic and join with the Monastery to turn the Podriga house into a Day Centre for adults in the surrounding communities who are desperately poor, isolated, lonely and living with physical or mental incapacity.



Viorel doing his 'Vidal Sasoon' impersonation on a beneficiary!

This is turning into a great success! The Archimandrite introduced the people to us, and we have welcomed a different group twice a week – very cautiously – picking them up and taking them to Podriga for companionship, food and therapeutic activities. One of the first introductions was to a man (let's call him Tomas) living in what can only be described as a hovel – no windows, no doors, no heating, no water nor warmth, no food. The priest asked us to wash him, which we would not do, because although that may suit Tomas it was not why he had chosen to come. Our role was to show him love, understanding and acceptance. To meet him where he was.



ABOVE: With Ukrainians buying clothes for school BELOW: Mr V and the priest playing chess



Alison came back from Botosani County in March, So Tomas came, along with a priest whom he knew and others also seeking something. They all had a cup of tea and talked amongst themselves, especially Tomas who talked the loudest. He talked rubbish! An hour of this went on and eventually Viorel went and got a game of chess. The priest and Tomas played an intense game for an hour and we all watched in silence as Tomas won.... We understood that you should never judge a man by his looks, his dirty appearance, and his apparent "madness". We hope, with support from



Family Onciu, Alison and the Archimandrite at the monastery

the priest, that Tomas will feel able to visit the house every week.

Recently a lovely older woman visited and whilst at Podriga she described what we do for her and others as a "miracle". But it goes both ways: she turns the skeins of wool into balls for knitting and helps prepare the lunch.

The Ukraine War had a devastating effect and in the initial stage one thousand cars a day coming across from Ukraine were passing our door at Podriga. We thought of helping with a temporary shelter there, although quickly realised that instead a presence was needed at the border crossing at Radauti Prut. The Botosani Deaf Association became our contact partner for this work. When Alison and Zeb (a great friend and wonderful medical volunteer) went to Romania they travelled to Radauti Prut on behalf of the Metropolitan (the Head of the Orthodox Church in Moldova and north-east Romania). He was using his priests on a six hourly rota to provide facilities such as soup, food, nappies and other hygiene items. We took our Archimandrite's shifts



Onions – failed harvest for us, and due to the drought NO apples – last year we had 3000 kgs



A lady who when working with wool says coming to us is a miracle!

so that he could look after the Monastery. Alison was kept busy as a translator between the English of the Ukrainians and the Romanian of the local volunteers offering support.

Gradually we have entered into long-term work with Ukrainians around Botosani. Fortunately, one of our longstanding part-time staff is Daniel Hliban is who also the President of the Deaf Association, so we were able to shift his work to focus on the Ukrainian refugees. Their office became a transit centre where deaf refugees stayed for 24 hours with their families and often their pets. From there they were found temporary accommodation ranging from a Soviet-era collective farm to a cinema in town. Having caught their breath they have mostly moved on to work and accommodation that the Romanian state and Ukrainian diaspora locate. Many of the refugees we have worked with are deaf, often mute, and some are almost blind as well. The trauma of war has affected small children who could see and hear the bombs which their parents could not. We communicate by sign language and writing, using smart phones to

help with translation. Using our accumulated experience we work only with the disabled and mentally ill. One elderly refugee came to us via two charities on the main border crossing at Siret. She was obviously very ill and weighed only 30 kgs, in addition to being deaf and mute. We immediately took her to casualty where she had endless tests and was assigned for major surgery the next morning. She survived, and a few months on is gaining weight, strength and a joyful spirit. She remains under our care and that of the Deaf Association at a Romanian rehabilitation hospital.



Mr.V = poverty



Ukraines with their car which we we used for transport



Zeb "The Horse Whisperer" and a wonderful asset with Medical supplies.

Your support

Agents of Change know you care about us and show concern about how we are managing. We thank you for your donations as we know you give what you can. We remain optimistic and ever hopeful. For further news and ways of donating and helping us, please visit our website: www.agentsofchange.co.uk

Thank you
Alison Butcher
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ENABLING PEOPLE THROUGH HEALTH EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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