



### **Visit report – 8 - 13<sup>th</sup> October 2007**

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Visiting our five children's homes in Bulgaria.

Report made by Agnes.

Cash taken on visit - euros 2.500,-

Spent: Pleven euros 1.100,-, Xmas project euros 500,-, Vratza euros 665,-, Printing costs euros 117,-,

Food euros 108,-.

### **Introduction/General**

Under the new rules, the children's homes – housing 3 – 20 year old – no longer fall under the Ministry of Education but under the Ministry of Social Affairs

Bulgaria joined the EU as from January 2007, therefore becoming subject to the rules and regulations of that governing body. The Bulgarian government desires therefore, where possible, to turn the existing children's homes into day care centres. The consequence is that many children from the orphanages will now be sent back to their own family home. There will be supervisory controls carried out by social workers, and in any dysfunctional situations the children will be allowed to return to the children's homes once again.

This of course will have a most disturbing and negative influence on the children, who are already heavily traumatized by their social background and circumstances. The government thinks to present the EU with due compliance of regulations by having the number of children resident in these homes seemingly drastically decrease. **Meanwhile there are lots of orphans and abandoned at birth children who have not a chance to return to their families. This number is quite high. The other great problem of when the kids leave the orphanage – no place to go, no profession, no life skills.**

It is indeed expected that within a very short term many children will be returning to the children's homes, making their traumatising even worse – it remains to be seen but scepticism is high.

I have not yet seen the above scenario actually functioning, it will take quite some time before this is implemented.

Children's homes for 0 – 3 year category still remain under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health.

### **DOGANOVO : – 67 children from 7 – 20 years old, Monday 8<sup>th</sup> October 2007.**

A sum of euros 1.000,- was handed over to Mr. Dunchev, on behalf of the Kloosterkerk, The Hague.

We discussed the changes (see introduction) and the consequences for the staff and the children

The practicalities of this are slowly becoming apparent and no-one is happy with the outcome so far.

The children will be soon be starting their lessons, which have been sponsored by the

Turing Foundation. English is proving to be a challenge. There are thoughts of combining these with

computer lessons in order to give more stimulance and understanding of the linked usefulness. Sport

lessons on the other hand are proving popular, also due to the presence of a sports teacher at the

summer camp. Mr. Dunchev was very satisfied with Anouk, who accompanied the younger children

for a four day stay at the summer camp. He expressed the hope that she would be able to come back

for a two week period next year. He will contact her to this end, further no specific issues here.

### **Conclusion – continuance of educational projects.**

**VRATZA: 80 children from 7 – 18 years old, Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> October 2007**

Completion of the boy's department and the entrance to the large hall.

This is an enormous improvement. Thorough inspection done and photos made.

The ventilation improvements for the girl's ward was unfortunately overlooked.

The rooms now look clean and nice, though the furniture is really obsolete. With the funds raised by the concert recently – euros 2.000 – and together with euros 665,- of the cash on hand we are going to buy cupboards, beds and bedspreads.

**Conclusion**

Hopefully the Wilde Ganzen and NCDO will be willing to make a donation to enable renovation to the first floor, (summer 2008) which houses the youngest group (7 – 12 years). The sum needed will be approximately euros 45.000. Albena will be reporting directly to them on her findings during the visit. We would then have been able to renovate nearly the whole building within three years, with the exceptions of the dining room and kitchen.

Bathroom facilities are still way below par and the exterior of the building is very neglected.

**PLEVEN: 270 children from 0 – 3 years old, Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> October 2007.**

Pleven is situated 180 kilometers north east of Sofia (2 ½ hrs. drive). This was our first visit to this children's home. It was built in 1977, and has six floors, with a total of 600 windows and doors which are all in a deplorable state. The interior and appliances are also in a very sorry state of repair. This home still falls under the Ministry of Health, which is a hive of communistic bureaucracy. The home is otherwise in a reasonable state. The staff make ends meet with their limited resources. We were shown round by the head nurse.

The state pays 7 leva (euros 3.50) per child per year for clothes, sheets and blankets.

**Fifty children are both physically and mentally handicapped and 28 children are slightly handicapped.** Staff count 178: 10 doctors, drivers, 82 nurses, administrative staff, kitchen staff.

They work in 8 hourly shifts. The monthly salary for a nurse is

leva 270 (euros 135,-) and for a doctor leva 570 (euros 285,-). During the day there are 4 nurses looking after 50 children, and at night this is only 2. They are mainly occupied with feeding and cleaning the children, who are changed four times a day. There are no pampers available so often the children are left to sit in their soiled clothes for longer periods. I am going to try and find a company who can supply us with plastic nappies at a considerably reduced or preferably free rate, so that the children's clothes and bedding are at least not wet and soiled constantly. The children do also suffer from severe cold during the winter due to strong drafts through the un-insulated windows and doors.

The staff would more than welcome a regular supply of pampers, but the amounts needed are huge – at least 1.000 a day, 0.20 leva per pampers, not to mention the problem of disposing of the used nappies.

There are 10 Baba's, who are being paid by an American charitable foundation. The children being looked after by the Baba's do get their own pampers, as otherwise the Baba's will decline to assist them.

**Conclusion:**

We discussed the renovation i.e. painting of ceilings and walls, of each unit (bedroom and playroom), but then specifically only the windows and exterior doors, which in turn open out onto a veranda. This would amount to approx. Euros 2.000. One wing consists of 4 units. We could at least make a start on this, but the plan needs to be worked out further. The building is so huge that our small foundation's contribution makes no significant impact at all. However, I am absolutely not pessimistic on the end effect, taking the view that every little helps, and we may receive unexpected assistance along the way.

I have therefore decided to have 540 sheets made for all the beds (2 for each bed), this being done in our sewing facility, costing euros 1.100,-, and thus providing a little comfort. This is all we can do for the moment, sad but true.

**DREN : 45 children from 3 – 7 years old, Thursday morning 11<sup>th</sup> October 2007.**

One of our contributors had given us euros 100.- to buy some fruit and vegetables. We arrived with a truck full! The chief director was away in Sofia, so we were shown around by her assistant director. There was an electrical cut off, so the gas cooker we had been able to donate last Xmas really saved the day.

Actually there is little news from this project. I found the children's playrooms rather bare. The explanation for this was that the Health inspectors from Perin had ordered that all soft toys were to be banned and that all remaining toys had to be disinfected each night by the staff on night duty. If a toy is sighted during a visit by one of the controllers, then there will be a fine of 500 leva (euros 250,-) which amounts to twice a monthly salary.

**Conclusion:**

Continuance of:

1. Paying for disinfectants for the next year, approx. 700,- per year
2. the two Baba's, euros 1.200,- per year. There are a total of 3 Baba's, and the very positive effect this is having is clearly noticeable. The children are less inclined to be reclusive and do now venture outside the building, thus viewing the outer world. They are also allowed accompanied visits their Baba's home.

**RAZLIV : 60 children from 7 – 20 years old, Thursday afternoon, 11<sup>th</sup> October 2007**

Completion of roof repair and new lavatory building.

The children were waiting for us upon our arrival, dressed in their newly donated ABN Amro t-shirts and shorts, which had been brought over by Amanda and Rients on their last visit. This was a lovely surprise for me and the children were happy and excited.

The last director had been given early retirement, and his replacement is a young lady of around 30 years of age. Also accompanying us on this visit, were a representative of the International Women's Club, and also the General Manager of Porsche in Bulgaria, who turned out to be of Austrian origin. They were also partially sponsoring this project. Our contribution however, was the largest – euros 12.500.-

(i.w.c. euros 2.500,-, and Porsche euros 2.000,-).

The new lavatory building is quite spectacular, and has been built on to the existing building whose roof is now repaired. Thanks to the new heating system installed in the home the lavatories are now also provided with heat so that the running water no longer has the chance to freeze up in the winter- an enormous step forward.

During the meeting held in the office there, the main topic was the new change in rules (see introduction) and the inevitable consequences. We did have a lady from the council present at this meeting, and we had the chance to ask our questions, receiving of course the usual diplomatic answers. However, the council is very positive about the renovation work being done and offers us every co-operation.

**Conclusion: This new facility is a great success**

No other developments at the moment. The bedrooms definitely need renovation. This is going to be such an expensive project that the idea of building a completely new unit opposite the existing home has been taken into consideration.

The council is willing to donate the land for this, and then a sponsor could build on this. These plans are only just taking shape at the moment.

This of course is not a viable project for our foundation, education being more our goal for 2008.

There is already an existing computer room.

**St. Sofia Orphanage, Sofia: 80 children from 0 – 3 years, Friday 12<sup>th</sup> October 2007.**

I planned to return here to take photos of the children and of the renovation work carried out at the beginning of this year which was sponsored by the Wilde Ganzen.

This children's home is now well supplied with sponsors/donators and no longer needs our help. Pleven is obviously where we need to concentrate our future efforts and resources.

17<sup>th</sup> October 2007

P.S. The second milk transportation which took place in July was received with open arms, and I was continually being thanked for this during my visit.

All credit therefore should be given to the person responsible - Jaap Roukens of Supplair.