

Bulgarian Children's Refuge Foundation

'faith, hope & charity'



VISIT REPORT 11 – Thursday 26th March – Monday 30th March 2009.

Five children's homes were visited: Dren, Pleven, Stara Zagorra, Vratza and Razliv.
Total of 1500 kilometers.

Report made by : Agnes van Uchelen, Chairman.

Fellow travellers:

- Mr. J.C. van Uchelen
- Mr. J. Morris of JustDesign, Amersfoort. JustDesign sponsors and designs our new website.

First Day: Dren, Thursday 26th March 2009: 45 children aged between 3 – 7 years old.
(15 children with mental handicaps, 4 of whom have Down syndrome)

An Abcoude school class had raised money to buy fruit and vegetables for these children. They hardly ever eat fruit, and were so delighted that they just gobbled up all the apples immediately.

Baba project

We introduced a Baba project in Dren in April 2007. At this moment there are five Baba's looking after eight mentally handicapped children. There has been a vast visible improvement in these children since this project started. The Baba is a source of extra love and attention, and helps the children to connect to the outside world. One Baba costs euros 75 a month, working 5 days a week, four hours per day. There will be an evaluation report made up in the autumn, which report will be sent to all the Baba sponsors.

A wonderful project for family/friends would be to adopt a Baba for five years!

The Baba's had prepared a lot of delicious dishes for us to eat together with the children. This was very helpful and enjoyable, and the children danced and sang for us as well.

The Foundation covers all the yearly disinfection costs, and during our goodbyes, the director also requested a vacuum cleaner, to which request we acceded.

Evening

There was an informal dinner with Mr. M. Elgersma, Dutch Vice Ambassador to Bulgaria.

Second Day: Pleven, Friday 27th March 2007 – 250 children aged between 0 – 3 years old.

Renovations

The main goal of this visit was the completion of the renovations to a ward where 50 babies with both physical and mental handicaps are housed. All 6 rooms, 4 bathrooms, 2 nurses' rooms and large hallway have been updated with: electricity, airconditioning (40-45 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer months), tiled floors, double glazing, paint and plasterwork, heating and sanitation.

Thanks to the support of the Wilde Ganzen (Wild Geese) and sponsors these renovations have been made possible, all the sponsors will receive photos of the improvements.

One sponsor supplied new curtain material for the whole building – 1.400 meters – and this will be sewn into curtains by our sewing workshop in Rebarkovo.

Medical issues

The Foundation pays for a physiotherapist for the handicapped babies since April 2008. In March 2009 the Foundation has also purchased apparatus which stimulates muscle strength and growth (high/low frequency). After following a special course, a start was made five days ago in implementing the treatments. Two physiotherapists treat between 10 – 15 children per day. There will be an evaluation after two weeks, after which time the treatments will be less frequent according to the individual needs. Photos upon request.

Kitchen

The kitchen has had to be closed due to lack of hygiene. The government does not help out here in any way, and are totally lacking in taking any responsibility. This means that it is a stalemate situation – if the kitchen is not suitably improved by 1st November, then there will be sanctions (permanent closure). Photos upon request.

Wherever there is a need for renovation/improvement there is a plea for help to the community (read foreign sponsors). Now that the Wilde Ganzen and the NCDO can no longer support us due to political reasons, we are beholden to private sponsors and corporate donations.

If you can support us in any way, please contact us through our website at Pleven, or through the bank. We will supply further relevant information at the earliest possible moment.

If there is a specialized Dutch company, who could assist here with networking, teamwork, and building social-responsibility awareness within commercial enterprises, we would be grateful to hear from you.

The NGO in Sofia would be happy to function in an intermediary position towards this end.

Building costs – first priorities:

1. *New floor – euros 15.000*
2. *Electrical and extractor installations*
3. *Double glazing*
4. *Tiled walls*

Quotes have been requested.

Third Day: Stara Zagorra, Saturday 28th March 2009 – 24 boys between the ages of 7 – 18 years old.

(Four boys attend Deaf School, one boy has learnt sign language)

A main goal of our visit was to check the new double glazing put in on the first floor where the boys' dormitory is: 8 bedrooms, homework room, directors' room, 2 playrooms, future computer room and a large hall window high above the ground floor (2.5 meters high).

Together with the workgroup Bulgaria, from Wijk & Aalburg, we were able to renew these windows before the heavy winter frost set in. The walls need to be finished off (paint job) but this will take place in the summer and be done by the workgroup, together with a few other odd jobs, all supervised by an overseer and translator.

The home will have to be totally renovated. We are waiting for the findings of the council as to what the new official designation will be, this is expected at the end of April. The home may stay open, but in view of the new regulations there will be a different set-up – until this is clear we are being careful with expenditure. Following a request from the lady director, the Foundation has

supplied plants and pots to cheer up the windowsills outside. I hope that we will be greeted by a sea of flowers on our next visit! The boys were delighted with this unexpected gift, and have promised to do their best to meet my expectations – it doesn't take much to make a child happy.....
Photos upon request

Fourth Day:

1. Vratza – Sunday 19th March 2009: 68 children between the ages of 7 – 18 years old.

Focus of our visit was to take photos of the last renovation to the children's ward housing 7 – 12 year olds. There had been no time to do this during my October visit.

The council will fulfill its promise, and will renovate the whole frontage of the building this summer. This promise was made after we had renovated all three floors of the home. When these improvements have been effected, we will return to Vratza

Education

- The children welcomed us with several breakdance sessions, the choreography of which was designed and implemented by one of the older girls – Iva. The Foundation has supported her in this by covering a small portion of the monthly costs for her. This enables the children involved to use their personal energy in a positive way, and are therefore less prone to aggressive moods. Sadly Iva will be leaving the home in June – we hope to find a suitable replacement for her to lead this project.

- The Foundation has been paying three teachers for extra curriculum lessons in spelling and Bulgarian grammar since January, for the children between 7 – 12 years.

Kitchen

The lady director has asked us for new kitchen cupboards, in which to house the daily crockery, and also for a donation to fix up the walls and ceiling. All the walls in the whole building are in need of a lick of paint.

*This would be a great project for a youth group who would be willing to help out here.
The NGO would be happy to assist as intermediary.*

2. Razliv: Sunday 29th March 2009: 40 children between the ages of 7 – 18 years old.

Jonathan had brought his laptop with him, and this contained photos of his visit last year. All the children gathered around him to have a look – especially at their own photo! Several of the older children no longer lived there due to them having to leave the upon reaching the age of 18, and had moved on to other destinations.

Education

Since autumn 2008 the Foundation has been paying for cookery lessons for the children and in January we supplied a new oven for them. When we came into the room, there was a vast table waiting for us full of the most wonderful dishes. Together with the children, we were able to devour all the food prepared for us in no time.

This home is in a very bad state of repair, but has a really wonderful atmosphere. The children are more than grateful for everything and are proud of their home. The three bedrooms are large and

have been provided with central heating last winter. The council has offered a large piece of land on the other side of the road, on which three units may be built, for the price of euros 100.000 per unit.

This would be a fantastic project for a generous sponsor to give his name to.....my thoughts go to a service club, building contractor, social housing corporation or multinational.

Next visit to the Children's Homes planned – 4 – 8 June 2009

2nd April 2009