



3  
Shoebboxes help family that fled from violence



6  
Simple gifts all useful to widow in Bulgaria



15  
Something new and unusead



# BLYTHSWOODNEWS

Number 73 Shoe Box Appeal 2020

**Shoebox gifts can be a first step to school**



Story on page 2

Cover story

## SHOEBOX GIFTS CAN BE A FIRST STEP TO SCHOOL



*Explore, squeeze, wonder – gift-filled shoeboxes provide loads of new experiences for children from some of the poorest households in Europe*

**A soft toy, a toothbrush, a pink rubber ball, coloured crayons.**

When you're three, everything is new. And some kind person far away has sent Larisa a whole box full of new things to be explored, squeezed and wondered at.

She doesn't know it yet, but the crayons which immediately caught her attention are a first step along the road that leads to school, literacy and participation in the big

wide world. Now she can learn how to hold a pencil.

The challenges that face Larisa are considerable. Her mother tongue is Romani, the language of the Roma people, but schooling is in Romanian. In pre-school nursery she will be expected to learn a whole new language.

Her mum learned to read and write with the assistance of Talita Kum, Blythswood's after-school programme, but dropped out of education at just 13 years of age to be



*Coloured crayons caught the attention of three-year-old Larisa*

married by the custom of her own people.

Her dad takes odd jobs in construction whenever he can and sometimes works away from home for weeks at a time.

Throughout the covid-19 lockdown this family of six received a daily warm meal from the Talita Kum canteen to make sure they did not go hungry.

By filling a box for Blythswood's Shoe Box Appeal you give practical aid to families like this, and open new horizons for children like Larisa.



## Shoebboxes help family that fled from violence



*Barnabas receives a shoeboxes outside his grandpa's house in Ozd, Hungary*

**If Barnabas looks a little dazed, it's because he's not sure what's going on. His mother has just disturbed his afternoon nap because somebody has arrived to give him a large, brightly-wrapped box.**

He's too young to understand that the new clothes, the soap, the sweets are things that his

mum has no money to buy for him or his baby sister. And too young to understand the reason they're all staying with his grandpa in a single-roomed house without a kitchen or toilet: his mum has fled from the violence and abuse she received from her husband, who has now been charged.

Neither his mum nor his grandpa have jobs. The presents that you have given this family are all useful. "Your kindness makes such a difference to families living in poverty," says Melinda who delivered the boxes to Ozd in northern Hungary. "Not every photo captures a smile but I can tell you that these people really appreciate the gifts."



*Warm hats and gloves are especially appreciated by men like Igor who have experienced homelessness*

## SURPRISED BY GIFTS AT REHAB CENTRE IN UKRAINE

**A woolly hat is a welcome gift for a man who knows what it is to live on the street. Igor (24) comes from a village in the Lviv region of Ukraine.**

Unable to find work, he turned to alcohol and soon found himself homeless. He had just started to turn his life around when gift boxes from

Blythswood's Shoe Box Appeal were distributed at a rehabilitation centre in the Black Sea port of Kherson.

"Igor was so surprised to receive your gifts," says shoebox distributor Tanya Shpygunova. "He told me that he longs to return to his home village and see his young son."



## Shoebox gifts for family hit by earthquake

**Your shoebox gifts brightened Christmas for a family in Albania whose home was damaged by an earthquake just one month previously. And Besa Shaplllo who delivered the gifts discovered that having a huge crack down the living room wall hadn't discouraged them from putting up a Christmas tree.**

"Dallendyshe always has a great smile and radiates positivity," says Besa. "She tries hard to do all that she can for her husband and three children.

"Even before the earthquake, their living conditions were poor, but she hasn't lost hope for her three children. Her name means swallow and just as the arrival of that bird

announces spring in Albania, I pray that the Lord may bring blessings to this family."

### Look what I've got!

For three-year-old Grisald the discovery of a soft ball in a Blythswood shoebox is an event he will remember. "And he was surprised by the toothbrush and toothpaste," says Besa. "He had never seen such things before."

He is the youngest of three children whose mother fled to Tirana to escape domestic violence but now faces a daily struggle to provide for her family.

"Blythswood has been blessing us with these boxes for 20 years," Besa says. "Children receive them with such a big smile that it is hard to describe in words."





*Petya with her calendar: in each box Blythswood provides a Bible story book for children, a booklet for teenagers or a calendar for adults*

## SIMPLE GIFTS ALL USEFUL TO WIDOW IN BULGARIA

**Petya wears all her clothes at home because she is cold. When Zhani Slavcheva visited the widow in Sliven, Bulgaria, the electricity was disconnected and there was no wood for the stove.**

"We gave her two boxes and the first thing she saw were sanitary pads," Zhani says. "She said they would be for her daughter who was expecting a baby a month later. "Then she found a sewing set with threads, needles and a

tape measure. That made her smile because she used to knit and sew to support her family while her late husband spent his wages on alcohol. She said God knew she had no reels of thread and had sent her some.

"She was as excited as a child, rummaging through her box and discovering three pairs of socks and a beautiful scarf.

"And she was pleased to see the calendar as she has a

bible and reads it and sometimes goes to church. We prayed and read with her the calendar's verse for February: Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

"We left Patya with boxes for her daughter, son-in-law and the expected baby. She was thankful for our visit and for the people who sent those nice boxes, but most of all thankful to God for His mercy."



*Aida, Ketrin and Valentina with their mum: your practical gifts bring joy and gratitude to families living below the breadline*

## YOUR GIFTS HELP THEM FORGET THEIR POVERTY

**Aida (5), Ketrin (6) and Valentina (7) lined up with their mum in the winter sunshine of Hungary's southern great plain to receive gifts from Blythswood's Shoe Box Appeal. Their youngest sister, four-month-old Csenge, isn't in the picture because she was taking a nap in their grandma's run-down house, where they all share one tiny room.**

**"Their dad doesn't live with them," reports shoebox distributor Irmus Buraine. "They're really hard up for money."**

Béla Szedmák, another distributor in the same area, wants to thank shoebox donors. "In today's world not many people have compassion for the poor," he says. "But you have shown once again that your heart is full of love.

"We wish we could show you what your gifts mean to them, how much joy and gratitude they bring to tired, desperate people. Even if only for a short time, you have helped them forget their loneliness, poverty and fear of the future."





*By filling a box for Blythswood's Shoe Box Appeal, you help families trapped in under-rewarded work and poverty*

## SOAP, SHAMPOO, TOOTHPASTE HELP FAMILIES IN KOSOVO

**Firjona is five years old, Valtrimi is three and Valtrina is not yet two. If they have shoes, they were not wearing them when Faton Berisha delivered Blythswood shoeboxes to their one-roomed home in a village near the city of Gjakova, Kosovo.**

Like several other families who received gifts from Blythswood's 2019 Shoe Box Appeal, the parents of these

children struggle to feed their family by recycling aluminium and plastics. A quick internet search backs up this scenario with news site france24.com referencing a report from 2018: almost half of all households in the Balkan state have no refuse collection, which creates an opportunity for families like these.

But it comes at considerable cost: it was estimated that workers in the unregulated

recycling sector earned between 50 and 100 euros per month, with children often assisting their parents in the hazardous work. The result is missed school and further stigmatisation of ethnic minorities, especially Roma families. Working with rubbish does not build respect. "The mother of these children said that the shoeboxes are so helpful to them," Faton says. "Especially toiletries such as soap, shampoo and toothpaste."



*Your gifts made Christmas come early for Valer and his family*

## A day with dad – Prisoners meet their children to open Blythswood boxes

**Valer is in prison in Satu Mare, Romania, serving a sentence of two years and eight months. He would be allowed to see his wife and two children every week but as they live 150 kilometres away and have no money they can only afford to visit once a month.**

So it was a red letter day when he was allowed to share the joy of opening Blythswood

shoeboxes with his family at a special event called A Day with Dad.

"It is organised by our partner organisation, the Union of Christian Men," says Balazs Csiszer, executive director of Blythswood Romania.

"The prisoners were allowed to meet with their families under supervision in a restaurant.

"The kids really loved the sweets and toys, especially a little car. For the men, the personal hygiene items were most important but everything in their boxes was really useful."



## Slava knows that somebody cares

**“Somebody thinks I’m important!”**

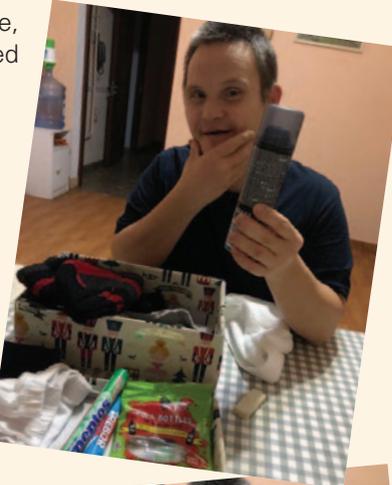
That’s the conclusion Slava draws when he is presented with a shoebox full of useful gifts.

When he lost his parents, many years ago, his uncle placed him in an orphanage, and later he was transferred to another.

Now aged 41, he shares a home in a village in northern Moldova with four other men affected by disabilities. He likes to wash the dishes at home, and plays the whistle in church.

When you fill a box for Blythswood’s Shoe Box Appeal, your act of kindness is something unique and personal, showing a disadvantaged adult or child that they are not forgotten.

*By filling a shoebox, you send a powerful message to someone like Slava, showing that they are not forgotten*



## BRAND NEW GIFTS FOR FAMILY WHO RECYCLE TO SURVIVE

**When you’re the youngest of eight children, you know what it is to come far down the pecking order.**

And when your mum and dad depend on collecting cans and plastics to feed their family, hardship is an everyday reality, even if you’re not aware of it at the age of three.

So you can only imagine how thrilled Omar was to receive a box full of brand new things all for himself. “The gifts that really caught his attention were sweets, a colouring book and pens, and a T-shirt,” reports Faton Berisha who distributed boxes in the city of Gjakova, Kosovo.

“We were able to give a box to each person in the household. Toiletries, and hats and gloves to keep them warm in winter are most helpful to a family like this, living in poverty. Most of the children don’t go to school because of their economic situation.”



*When you fill a box with new things, you are providing an incredible experience for a child such as Omar*



Happy family: your gifts bring joy to Lyudmila and her boys

## SWEETS HELP MOTHER TO MOTIVATE HER TWINS

**'You can have one if you're good.'**

How often have you used sweets to reward your children or grandchildren?

Lyudmila uses them for something even more

basic – to incentivise her six-year-old twins to crawl.

At first doctors had attributed Vanya and Nikiti's slow development to their premature birth at 33 weeks. But eventually it became apparent that the children had serious

health problems. At twelve months they could neither hold up their heads, nor sit, nor grip something with their hands.

And during that first year of being a mother, Lyudmila suffered some crushing blows. Her husband died suddenly of pneumonia when the boys were just three months old. Then her mother who had been such a support to her also passed away.

Left alone to bring up with two children with serious disabilities, Lyudmila pours her endless love and patience into teaching her boys the most basic mobility skills. "She was so glad to receive your Christmas gifts," says Tanya Shpygunova who distributes Blythswood shoeboxes in Ukraine. "She loved the sweater and hat, but especially the sweets because for the sake of the sweets Vanya and Nikita are ready to crawl hard."



Be happy with what you have: Djurdje shares his dad's positive outlook on life

## BASIC GIFTS HELP SCHOOL CHILDREN IN SERBIA

Djurdje lives in Palic, Serbia. He loves school and was really pleased to get a note book and pencils in his Blythswood shoebox. For families like his, providing even the basic items that the children need for school can be a challenge.

His little brothers were delighted with the toys and warm clothes they found in their boxes. His dad Nebojsa explained the family's philosophy to shoebox distributor David Armus, saying, "We try to be happy with what we have, and not to be unhappy because of things we don't have."



Your gifts of shaving soap and razors are a rare luxury for Joska

## WHERE SHAVING SOAP AND RAZORS ARE RARE COMMODITIES

**Joska's standard of living would be unrecognisable to most people in Europe. He used to keep a pig and thought nothing of taking a sow and piglets into his house. That's in the past. Nowadays whatever scraps of food he finds in other people's bins he uses to feed himself.**

"His was one of several homes for which Blythswood provided ceramic stoves many years ago," says Adrian Popa, who directs Blythswood's work in the Banat region of Romania. "He still uses it today."

"Each year when we bring him a shoebox, the items he prizes

most are shaving soap and razors. For him these are rare commodities."

Some of Joska's children and grandchildren have benefited from Talita Kum, Blythswood's afterschool programme that aims to break the generational cycle of illiteracy and poverty.

# A DAY OF PRAYER FOR BLYTHSWOOD CARE



Wednesday 16th  
September 2020

12 Hours of Prayer for Blythwood Care (9am – 9pm)

2020 has reminded us of our dependence on God and the necessity of prayer.

On Wednesday 16th September, we're encouraging supporters from across the world to be united in praying for the people and projects of Blythwood Care.

There is power in prayer not because of who we are, or because of the organisation we represent, but because of who God is and because of what Jesus has done.

**For our Day of Prayer 12 hour leaflet, or to find out more, please visit [blythwood.org/prayer-diary](http://blythwood.org/prayer-diary) or email [mairi.ferrier@blythwood.org](mailto:mairi.ferrier@blythwood.org)**



**For your diary Wed 16th Sept** be united in praying for the people and projects of Blythwood Care.

*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)*



## Something new and unused

**When it's really cold outside, Rosen's world is confined to his parents' bed. His game is to look out the window. His aunt and uncle's bed is a few feet away and Rosen is forbidden to go there. Two beds, a smoky stove, a dirty window – that is his world.**



*Rosen with his motorbike*

Rosen's grandfather had recently been released from prison and was trying to repair his small house which is home to ten people. Zhani says: "Amidst these difficult conditions, the family is happy and the children are grateful for even the smallest things."

But now the three-year-old has a new game – playing with his motorbike! "When he opened the shoebox and saw it, he was wildly happy," says Zhani Slavcheva. "It was an unforgettable experience for him to have his own toy, something that is unused by his older relatives."

"Of course he was happy about the scarf, hat and pencils but the motorcycle really amazed him."



*Bulgaria, December 2019: Rosen's grandparents outside their home*

## YES, WE ARE SENDING SHOEBOXES THIS YEAR!

**The global pandemic has devastated families at home and abroad, especially those who have been unwell, have lost loved ones or have experienced redundancy.**

Thanks to your generosity, Blythwood Care has been able to continue its vital work during lockdown, feeding those in greatest need in the communities in which we work.

Those worst affected are those who live hand to mouth. For them, no work means no food. For their sake, Blythwood's 2020 Shoe Box Appeal must go ahead.

**For them, the gift of a box full of essential, everyday items is more helpful than ever.**

Soap, shampoo and toothpaste for a young family in Kosovo who survive on sifting rubbish (see page 8).

Needles, threads and a tape measure for a grandmother in Bulgaria who loves to sew (page 6).

A packet of sweets for a young widow in Ukraine who struggles to motivate her twins, born with disability (page 12).

Yes, simple gifts like these really are invaluable to people in need. As one shoebox distributor in Hungary wrote: "In today's world not many people have compassion for the poor, but you have shown once again that your heart is full of love. We wish we could show you what your gifts mean to them, how much joy and gratitude they bring to tired, desperate people."

Please fill a shoebox again this year. In these challenging times I can assure you it will be a huge blessing to all who receive your generous gifts.



**James Campbell**  
Chief Executive



*Kosovo, December 2019:*

*"The mother of these children said that the shoeboxes are so helpful to them, especially toiletries such as soap, shampoo and toothpaste."*  
*See page 8.*

*"...we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (Acts 20:35)*

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