

# Anna's Story

## my life matters...



My time in Romania was absolutely incredible and I simply can't describe how much I loved it! There were difficult times but also a lot of happy moments. But whatever the situation, one thing was clear: how much God was working through the people and their situations. The Smiles Foundation have various projects running throughout the summer and I participated in a different one each day.



**Bare library at Gepiu  
(to be stocked by us)**

I spent my first working day painting classrooms at Gepiu Community Centre. This Centre provides after school classes and assistance for children who otherwise would not have the facilities to study at home. Kevin Hoy, Chief Executive and one of the founders of The Smiles Foundation, reminded us on the first day how important every bit of work was and this personally made a massive difference to me whilst working at Gepiu on the first day. It would have been so easy to think that painting a couple of classrooms was simply a menial job... but then you remember the children who are so excited by the thought of a decorated classroom and you really begin to see the meaning and purpose behind the work. As a group we have decided to donate some of our "surplus" fundraised money towards books for the small library at Gepiu, as they need more books to help and encourage the children to read.

During the summer, Smiles run a Holiday Bible Club which goes out to various villages. I helped with this on the Tuesday. The highlight had to be teaching them the song "Jesus' love is very wonderful" (complete with actions of course!) It was great to see the children having fun and enjoying themselves and the Smiles staff working with the children was inspirational.

On the Wednesday I visited Tileagd nursery and school complex. The nursery aims to integrate Romanian and Gypsy children. The idea of the school complex came about when Kevin Hoy met a 10-year-old boy begging on the streets of Oradea. Kevin took the boy for dinner and then met his family who were living in extreme poverty with make-shift housing and no hygiene facilities. Smiles began working with the village and began building a better life for the community. When Kevin asked one of the men what his dream for the future was, he replied: "to have our children educated" - and this is where the initial idea of a community school emerged. The school now (in 2011), is absolutely incredible. It is a large complex consisting of many classrooms, a canteen, showers, a sports hall and a dental surgery. To think that all this came about through the hard work of Smiles, its supporters and through the will of God just shows what is possible with a dream and faith.



**Children at Tileagd school**

The following day I worked with one of Smiles' social workers and visited families within the region of Bihor. The first family I visited were actually sponsored by one of the guests currently staying at Smiles. It costs £30/month to sponsor a family and this assists them with basic living expenses. The second visit of the day was to an elderly people's home. Here I was particularly moved by the story of one lady who had to be put into care after having fallen into a diabetic coma at home when people had tried to charge her double for her medication. Neighbours found her on the floor after she had been lying there for 20 hours. Despite all this she has such



**Family visits**

a strong faith. When you see people living in such situations it puts your own life into perspective and makes you truly grateful for everything we have in our lives. Another family we visited had no electricity, no water, no food supplies and collected scrap from the rubbish in order to sell for money. This family had signed a dodgy contract agreeing to pay off the previous owner's water bills before their water would be re-installed. When the social worker asked why they had signed this contract the man replied that he was simply happy to have a roof over his head after having been living on the streets for the past few months. The final family I visited lived on just £30/week. Smiles deliver food parcels to



**At the elderly people's home**

these families to assist with living costs but even with this assistance they struggle to get by.

On Friday I visited The Salard Community. Smiles have only been working there for a few years and so many of the people still live in poor conditions. One small house consisting of two rooms housed 18 people. Smiles have placed a few 20ft shipping containers in the village which have been converted into homes and have replaced some of the poorest houses. There is still a lot of work to be done with both the housing and the people there but Smiles are continuing to work with the community.



**At Salard**

I also visited the emergency housing unit that Smiles have set up for victims of domestic abuse. At the moment there are currently two families living there. One woman had run away from her alcoholic husband with her children and had chosen to live on the streets rather than return to her abusive husband. Without the help from Smiles such families would still be living in poverty on the streets or trapped in abusive relationships.



**Weeding in the glasshouse.**

Smiles have also set up a couple of enterprise initiatives which aim to increase self-sufficiency in Romania. One of these is a large-scale glasshouse which currently has almost 10,000 cucumber plants. Local villagers are employed here. I worked here on the Saturday (in 35.5°C heat), training cucumbers up their strings and

weeding around the plants. Smiles already have a contract with a business for the purchase of their cucumber crop and aim that by 2013 the glasshouse (in combination with another of their enterprise initiatives) will contribute around £100,000 profit per year. This will enable Smiles to further support the poor communities in Romania and assist with the running costs of other Smiles projects.

On my final day I was asked to take a group of 8 children to a swimming complex at Baile Felix. This was their reward for attending church regularly over the past few months. It was an extremely tiring day but nonetheless enjoyable!

I thoroughly enjoyed my 10 days in Romania and only wish I could have stayed longer! The staff at the mission centre were absolutely incredible and made my time there even more fun! From taking part in this mission trip I have come to see that as a Christian I have a duty to serve. When you see the need, you feel God calling you to respond and that's what I intend to do. I titled this article "My life matters" (inspired by devotions by Kevin); I want my life to matter and I can make a difference to others' lives simply by living for God and demonstrating his love. When the Lord called Samuel, he replied "Speak, for your servant is listening". As a servant of Christ I reply in a similar vein...



**Children from the church in Tileagd.**

*"Here I am Lord, Is it I Lord? I have heard You calling in the night. I will go Lord, if You lead me. I will hold Your people in my heart."*

I would like to thank everybody for both their prayers and financial support – both of which enabled me to have this incredible experience and work with the amazing organisation that is *The Smiles Foundation*. Please continue to pray for the work they are doing in Romania.

#### How can you help?

If you are interested in supporting Smiles, please ask for a form or contact [aclarke196@hotmail.com](mailto:aclarke196@hotmail.com)  
Alternatively you can donate online at [www.thesmilesfoundation.org/support/support.html](http://www.thesmilesfoundation.org/support/support.html)

