

LDS Living

Two Hearts, One Mission: Mother and Daughter Help Bulgarian Orphans

Sunny Jane Morton - LDS Living



Donna Dushku and her daughter, Deborah Gardner, have a lot in common. Both are positive and energetic, each has five children, and they share a special goal: working on behalf of hundreds of Bulgarian orphans.

Donna recalls what inspired her to get involved. "After my children became adults, I had time to do something else in my life," she says. She decided to volunteer at One Heart Bulgaria, a charity that supports Bulgarian orphanages, which is directed by her daughter. But Donna was in California, hundreds of miles from Deborah and the foundation's office in Providence, Utah. So she and her husband, Nicholas, decided to move to Providence.

It's easy to see how Donna, along with hundreds of others, could feel so strongly about this charity's work that she would sacrifice so much for it: Over 1,200 orphaned children at twenty Bulgarian orphanages currently receive humanitarian aid through One Heart Bulgaria. Nine of these orphanages receive major assistance - medical and hygiene supplies, food, bedding - through sponsorships arranged by the charity. From medical and dental care to washing machines and dryers, from sports and choir teachers to life-saving shunt operations for youngsters with hydrocephalus, One Heart Bulgaria provides a wide range of care that the parents of these orphans couldn't. The charity even provides surrogate grandmothers, babas, by facilitating visits by local Latter-day Saint women who rock babies and cuddle attention-starved children. "I receive lots of pictures. Some of those pictures haunt me because many children are sad and so neglected," says Donna, who is now sponsorship director for the charity. "Sometimes I start to feel angry . . . or frustrated that I can't do more for them. Then I see that we are making a difference and I get excited and dive into this work again." Deborah acknowledges the critical role her mother plays. "She will take up responsibilities when the rest of our staff is too busy," she says. "My dad helps too. If they weren't helping with this, I would have to fold. There's no way I could run this organization without their help." But Donna has come to see this as the next logical step in her life—a place she can serve with all her heart. "Trying to raise five children to grow into wonderful adults who are active in the Church was my first mission," Donna reflects. "Now it has become so important to me to work with Deborah and her associates. This work has become a type of mission for me—my own humanitarian mission to help these children." To learn more about One Heart Bulgaria, visit oneheart-bg.org or call (435) 764-3093.