

One Heart Bulgaria

HOPE • LIFE • FUTURE
for Orphans

Volume 11

New Year 2014

One Heart Bulgaria founders tour facilities

This past July, One Heart Bulgaria co-founders Deborah Gardner and Heidi Barker went on a lengthy tour of the facilities supported by One Heart. Their trip to the orphanages was very productive and exciting! Deborah tells about the trip:

We visited and assessed 15 orphanages throughout western and central Bulgaria and two children's hospitals where we will be providing rehabilitative training and equipment. We also delivered thousands of dollars' worth of basic supplies,

such as detergents, underwear, towels, socks, medicines, soap, toothpaste, shampoo, etc.—all provided by our donors. (Thank you!). Meetings with the mayor of Kotel and a representative of Bulgaria's Child Protection Services in Plovdiv also proved to be quite helpful. It was very gratifying to see, firsthand, the difference One Heart Bulgaria is making in so many children's lives!

Among the more delightful experiences we had at the orphanages were: watching the Taekwondo

group train at Assen Zlatarov; meeting the participants in our Gabrovo sewing class and receiving their handmade gifts; taking a group of kids out on a field trip to a museum and ice cream; bubblegum-blowing and handstand contests with teenagers; cuddling sweet babies and small children; and hanging out with the 7-18 year old children at the beautiful new library/computer rooms we created at Assenovets and Bratsigovo. The children LOVE to read there, as well as put puzzles together, draw, and just hang out

together. It was gratifying to see so many children in one room getting along

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with one another and truly enjoying themselves. A special thank you to our Sponsorship Director, Donna Dushku, our Field Director, Dr. Nickolai Gavazov, and our donors for creating those truly wonderful libraries!

It was in one of these very libraries where I had a breakthrough with one withdrawn and serious 13 year old. He and his three younger siblings were placed in an orphanage after his mother died and his father was sent to prison. This young boy was carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders and loads of grief in his tender heart. He kept his siblings close to him, taking on the role of father. Sensing the magnitude of his pain, the mother in me wanted to scoop him up and hold him, to tell him he was not alone and that we would help him and his siblings. I tried to have a conversation with him, but he wasn't interested. He'd learned to be strong, independent, and not need anyone. I knew better, however.

I learned from our librarian that this boy absolutely devoured books. He was the top reader of the orphanage! I finally got a smile out of him upon complimenting his insatiable appetite for literature. I asked him what his favorite book was and a conversation ensued. Forty-five minutes later, Ivan and I were bosom buddies—laughing, talking, and connecting over books.

When it was time for me to go, Ivan was the one child who walked me down the stairs and out the door to our car. I stood



Ivan and his sisters and brother stand by the open door of their new library. Could this be the doorway to a new life for them?


there for a second, debating whether or not to hug that teenage boy good-bye. A feeling inside me told me that a motherly embrace was still exactly what Ivan needed, so I hugged him tightly. This was a powerful moment – Ivan didn't want to let go.

I have learned to keep my composure through countless heart-wrenching situations so as to not trouble the children with my tears, but in this particular instance, I really struggled. As we drove away, Ivan stood on the gravel, watching us disappear. I took comfort knowing that he knew someone loved him. In addition, I knew Ivan would be looked after by our sweet librarian and other One Heart Bulgaria staff members.

It is one of the greatest callings of my life to work with the sweet orphans of Bulgaria. I love those children! I want to express my gratitude to all of our supporters. You make it possible for these children to have full tummies and things like diapers and beds and moments of joy. I cannot thank you enough!



Young volunteers sort baby clothes for the orphanages.




One Heart Bulgaria, through donations from generous folks like you, has created library/computer rooms in orphanages in Bulgaria. The tables and shelves are there, but as for books, they are pretty scarce. Now it's time to . . .



...FILL THE SHELVES!

Rather than sending actual books to Bulgaria, One Heart asks for monetary donations to buy books in Bulgarian to fill the needs of the appropriate age groups. The funds will be sent to One Heart Field Director, Nikolai Gavazov (shown right with our librarian at Bratsigov Orphanage). Nikolai will consult our librarians to find out which books are needed.



Donate and we will place a name plate on your shelf of books.

Fill a shelf for \$500!

Fill a wall for \$2000!

Reading rewards for \$10.00

Join us in filling these shelves with fun, interesting and educational books to promote a love of reading in these kids' lives. Write your check to One Heart Bulgaria and send your donation to financial officer Jen Djambov, at 561 North 150 West, Centerville, UT 84014. Please specify "Library Books" on the check. Find us on Facebook to see our latest news.



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American Taekwondo clubs raise funds for Assen Zlatarov dojang



The benefits of martial arts training are well known and now taekwondo classes are transforming the lives of children in



one of our orphanages! We are thrilled to see “our kids” develop self-confidence and self-esteem while having fun learning martial arts skills from their sports hero, Asen Minkov, a well-known Bulgarian sports star. Asen loves these kids while he inspires and trains them to win medals in tough competitions. One-hour classes are taught three times a week.

Jack Voutov and Object Systems International (based in Layton, Utah and Plovdiv, Bulgaria) are sponsoring these taekwondo classes for boys and girls at Assen Zlatarov Orphanage.

Wally Midgley and his KTA Florida taekwondo class (pictured above) have purchased equipment and are helping sponsor the dojang. Jack has reported, “The classes have a tremendous importance of teaching the kids important qualities they are not getting from anywhere else and will be vital for their integration in society once they leave the orphanage.”

Mario and Valya (left) both won medals at the Sofia cup competition, but look bummed out because they didn’t win first place! Hristina and Yavor (opposite page) fought in a taekwondo competition for the Bulgaria Cup 2013 which had over 500 competitors from 10 countries. Both won medals!

Heidi and Deborah had a positive report when they visited one of the taekwondo classes last July: “It was really fun to



Hristina won a medal in the Bulgaria Cup

see the kids practicing taekwondo in their class at the Assen Zlatarov orphanage for children ages 7-18. We were very impressed with the teacher and how good he is with the kids as he

teaches them martial arts and self-discipline. The sponsor of this program is a Bulgarian living in Bulgaria. He regularly attends practices and matches and all the kids have not only come to know him, but think of him as an uncle figure. We are very pleased with this program!"

On November 16th, the students at the Idaho Martial Arts Academy in Rexburg, Idaho, held a taekwondo friendship fundraiser to raise money for the Assen Zlatarov taekwondo club. The students had practiced for several months and put on a program that included nunchuck skills, forms, sparring, and board breaking. Several hundred dollars were raised that will go directly to their new friends in Sofia! The IMAA now plans on doing a fundraiser every year for their Bulgarian martial arts buddies.



Our taekwondo coach, sponsors and orphanage director all have a common goal to help these kids have a better chance in the future and to avoid the path of criminals like so many kids that leave the orphanage. One Heart Bulgaria is proud to promote this wholesome program!



Yavor won a medal in the Bulgaria Cup



TEACHERS CHANGE LIVES!

**ONE HEART BULGARIA TEACHERS
MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF
KIDS IN BULGARIAN ORPHANAGES!**



Help keep our teachers employed by donating to our Teacher Fund. Write a check to One Heart Bulgaria and mail to financial officer Jen Djambov, at 561 North 150 West, Centerville, UT 84014. Please specify "Teacher Fund" on the check. Find us on Facebook to see our latest news!



Assenovets folk dance
teacher Rositsa, with
Field Director Nikolai
Gavazov



Music teacher Zornitsa
at Vidrare
orphanage



The music teacher and kids at
Assenovets orphanage



Bratsigovo teacher Zornitsa



**TAI KWON DO SINGING
LIFE SKILLS COOKING
SEWING CARPENTRY
DANCE READING
THESE CLASSES GIVE JOY,
CONFIDENCE, A SENSE OF
BELONGING, HOPE, FUN TO
ORPHAN CHILDREN**



Asen teaches
Tai Kwon Do



This dedicated lady
teaches sewing
and cooking
to older
kids at
Gabrovo



Lubomir Mladenov teaches carpentry
at Maria Louisa
orphanage



Rumelia teaches
music at
Buzovgrad

Siblings serve in Sofia

by Herbie Bennett

This past summer, I had the stellar opportunity to volunteer in two different orphanages in Sofia with my teenage brother and sister. Having served a mission for my church in Bulgaria from 2010 – 2012, the chance to return to Bulgaria and to help these children was too much to pass up.

Over the course of about a month, we worked with three different groups of children from two different orphanages in central Sofia. The ages ranged from eight to fifteen years of age. Surprisingly for me, many of the kids still had contact with their birth parents, who did not have the capacity to care for them for a variety of reasons.

My fifteen year old brother, Sam, and I taught the teenagers how to play chess. Every day after lunch, all five of us would sit down in their kitchen, bring out the chess board, and go to work on our tournament. I would translate as Sam taught the three boys the rules and techniques of the game. Sam and I used origami as a method of teaching English. Sam would teach them in English, and I would translate between the two languages, teaching words as we went.

With the younger children, we would play soccer and badminton in the park, and teach them words in English as we played. It was amazing how quickly the kids integrated us into their groups. My sister, Bonnie, would coach the kids on their drawings and artwork. They especially loved drawings of spiders.

One of the greatest experiences of the summer came on our final day with the children. My entire family had flown into Sofia for the final week to travel around the city, while my brother and I were wrapping up with the orphanages. So for our final goodbyes, I brought my family to meet these won-



derful kids. On a bright and gorgeous day, we decided to play soccer for a few minutes before departing. The Bulgarian kids surrounded my youngest siblings, Andrew and Julia, as they were all the same age. Though they could not communicate effectively through language, they were instantly the best of friends, running up and down the asphalt play yard.

Just a few weeks ago in Salt Lake, I overheard my eight year old sister, Julia, explaining to one of her friends from school about her friend Mitko, from Bulgaria. I had forgotten Mitko's name until that moment, but my little sister, having only known Mitko for an hour, still remembered him. I had gone to Bulgaria expecting to serve the orphans there, but I did not expect the effect that working in Sofia has had on my entire family. Julia still asks how the kids in Sofia are, and she frequently requests that we go see them again. I am very grateful for the opportunity afforded me to work in Asen Zlatarov Orphanage. I hope to return again soon.

Six weeks serving in Bulgarian orphanages

by Alyssa Strazanac

Six weeks may sound like a long time to spend in a foreign country, but six weeks in Bulgaria really flew by for me. I've been very lucky to have had many experiences abroad ranging from a few weeks to ten months, not only traveling, but studying abroad and volunteering. This August was my first time in Bulgaria and I arrived not knowing quite what to expect and found so much kindness with those that I met.

In the short time I was there, I was fortunate enough to have visited two orphanages several times in Sofia, where I stayed most of the time, and also to have visited an orphanage in Plovdiv for the weekend. There are two things that I experienced in Bulgaria that will stick with me for a long time, the

local Bulgarian organization in Sofia called Dechitsa, and the girls I spent the weekend with in Plovdiv.

Dechitsa is a Bulgarian organization that pairs Bulgarian volunteers with the orphans at an orphanage in Sofia. They tend to work with the younger children and they try to meet at least once a week for activities. In all of my time abroad and with foreign friends, volunteering has not been common. Volunteerism is an important part of our culture in the USA, but I have not really seen much similar attitudes towards volunteering anywhere else. I was blown away by these Bulgarians, in fact, I asked many of them why they were volunteering and often got similar responses; they always wanted to do something like this, but didn't know it existed and

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then one day they found the organization through facebook or a friend. I hope that this spirit of volunteering will spread



more in Bulgaria and around the world. My weekend in Plovdiv was an adventure. I had visited for a day earlier in the week, but wasn't able to stay longer until the weekend. I arrived on a Friday afternoon, when there was no staff that spoke any English, only the two teenage girls on the hall I stayed in spoke a little bit of English. The only other children on the hall were these younger twin sisters, who seemed to know how to say "Michael Jackson", which they repeated to me many times, although I'm not sure why, but that was pretty much the extent of their English.

So with minimal verbal communication I spent the weekend with these girls and ate meals with them, played games, arm wrestled, listened to them play piano, watched terrible bootleg versions of the

Titanic and overall had a really nice time. On that Sunday there was an event in the center of Plovdiv held by the chocolate company Milka that we were attending. On our way there, I let one of the twins borrow my camera. She took some wonderful candid pictures and was really getting the hang of it when it was time for me to leave.

One Heart Bulgaria was an incredible resource for my stay. I would not have had the opportunities or experience I had without their help. Their mission to help orphans in Bulgaria is a tall order, but with help from volunteers and contributors, I believe they are making a real difference in the lives of many orphans. I can not begin to know if I had any impact on the people I met in Bulgaria but I can say they certainly had an impact on me.

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Do you want to make automatic monthly donations? Visit www.oneheart-bg.org and click on "donate" to learn how.



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