

# LIFELINE ROMANIA

*with*

# CHESTERFORDS AID

Spring 2017

Registered Charity Number 1061999



## Panciu Baptist Church

Cris has led the Panciu Baptist Church for 15 years. Originally they met in a room in his house, but they overflowed into the entrance hall and another room right from the start. After many years he was able to build a bigger place to meet. We helped with both finance and furnishings. Now they have outgrown that place. Sometimes it is big enough, but other times children have to sit on the stairs. At last they have been able to buy a plot of land near the town centre, with help from an American doctor. The day we left Romania was the day the builders started preparing the foundations.



The site is an overgrown wasteland, next to a block of flats. Cris managed to buy it from an old schoolfriend. A professional building company will make the foundations, drains, etc. Then the Moldovan Bible Mission hope to put up the shell of the building. After that, Cris and friends will need to finish the job. It will take a while.

The architect got rather carried away with the design, and didn't seem to understand the financial limitations of the job. He came up with a very elaborate design, which was far beyond what the church could afford. Cris returned to the architect and asked him to simplify the place and eliminate a lot of the expensive "frills". This has been done, but we just don't have the up-to-date picture yet. It will be built at ground level, so no steps up to the door, and no basement. It may also lose the balcony; everything depends on the availability of the money. Certainly it's a big job. Being in the town centre will be an asset.



We went to the existing Panciu Baptist Church one Sunday morning; we arrived a little late and the only available seats were just behind the door. We were able to look round and saw some new faces. Cris now has some able helpers.

Emanuel and his wife moved to Panciu last October with their 3 boys (including twins). Both parents work as nurses, and found it hard to make ends meet. They considered moving to England to find work. Both speak English (Emanuel learned it from watching American cartoons on TV!), but when they investigated living costs in the UK they realised that houses were far too expensive here, way beyond what they could afford on the salary of nurses in England. They decided to stay in Romania, and they have been a great asset to the church.

Another new family is from a village about 10 miles away. Nelu is very capable and sometimes leads the service or preaches. His brother and sister are also Christians and they come often.

Another church family emigrated in 2004, but they hope to return to Panciu this year. Whether they can stay depends on whether they can get jobs.

## Wheelchairs

A disabled friend of ours went on holiday to South Africa, and on her return journey, British Airways managed to break her expensive lightweight wheelchair. They offered to lend her a chair until they could get hers mended, but she was not happy with the chair they offered at first. It had small wheels, so not appropriate for a person living alone without any feet. She needed big wheels so that she could propel it herself. After much grumbling and searching, they found one with big wheels, and told her it was the only one in the airport. She went home with it, and waited a month for her own chair to be repaired and returned.

The delivery driver who returned her chair would not take the other chair back. She wrote to Heathrow several times, and didn't get any reply. Finally she said, "If you don't pick it up in the next 3 weeks, I'm giving it to charity"! They replied and said, "OK. Give it to charity". No wonder they are short of wheelchairs at the airport.

We collected it, and 2 more which were stored in her garage. All three were taken to Romania, and 2 were given away. The airport chair is still there waiting for the next person who needs one.

At the end of our trip, a lady came into the shop and asked if we had a wheelchair available for her mother-in-law. We did, so we unpacked the chair and took it to the home of this lady; mother-in-law lives with the family. Her name was Aurora and she was 61 years old. She had been in a car accident more than 10 years ago and had been unable to walk since then.



Without a wheelchair Aurora could not go anywhere. She lived on the edge of the town, opposite the cemetery and the family did not have a car. She was delighted with it.

Earlier, we had given another wheelchair to an "old man" – that was all we had been told about the recipient of the chair. When we met him, we discovered that he was 2 years younger than us – but he looked at least 10 years



older. Bujor had been ill for 4 months, ever since he had an operation to remove a tumour on his lung. To reach the tumour, doctors had to remove two of his ribs; he told us that he could still feel the hole and it was painful. Whilst dealing with the tumour, the doctors noticed a problem in his colon. They dealt with that, and then he couldn't walk. He was then sent home, without any physiotherapy or further treatment. He was sent home to die.

From the time he came home in January, until we arrived at the end of April, he had been in bed, in a rather dingy room in his house. He was unable to get out of bed and his wife couldn't help much because she had a bad back.

Nelu and Ştefan (neighbours) picked him up and put him in the wheelchair. They *carried* the chair outside and we saw a huge smile on his face. He said how much he appreciated the sunshine. He really didn't want to go back inside, but he had to. We couldn't stay there all day.

His wife would have been unable to get him back in the house. The house was a strange design with many unnecessary steps, both up and down. He needed to eliminate the steps, and have a ramp from the back door to the yard. Then he could go out. They said they would ask their sons to do the work. Since they did it, Bujor has enjoyed the sunshine almost every day.

His name, Bujor, is the Romanian word for Peony.

## It's a small world in Haret

**H**aret is a village a few miles north of Mărășești. Two years ago, building work started on a Baptist Church on a quiet street. Within the year, they were using the place, and now it is almost finished. It is often difficult to buy land for the purpose of building a Baptist Church. Many people regard Baptists as a cult, and think that they will have bad luck if they sell land or buildings to them – but a lady called Ioneta was willing to sell. She lives in a house on the same street, just a few yards up the hill. Her sister lives opposite the church. We found out this story in an unexpected way.

Camelia had decided to join us for the last few days of our trip. On her journey, she broke her suitcase and her boot. On her first morning, we went to the shoe repair shop. We were almost there, when we heard someone shouting her name. It was Ioneta, in Mărășești with her sisters. She had spotted Camelia across the street, and recognised her despite not having met for nearly 20 years. Ioneta's sisters joined us, one looked at me and said, "I know you. You go to the Baptist Church in Haret". Ioneta was amazed that her sister knew me, and gradually the story came out; Ioneta sold the land to Cris, I knew Cris and Camelia, and Ioneta's sister knew me. It's a small world; they have the same phrase, "o lumeă mică"!

We went to the church twice during our visit; Cris led the service and played the music for the hymns. They were still singing Easter hymns even though it was a week or two beyond Easter.



Roger talked to the children about Creation, and Cris translated. Because the electricity had come on just a few hours before the meeting, we

were able to have music, pictures projected on the wall, light, and even a microphone. Roger started by showing the children an inflatable "world", about the size of a beach ball. Mihai's eyes opened wide, and he said, "Wow" – the same in both languages. He had never seen one before, even though the globe had been bought in Romania. Haret is a backwater, with little in the shops apart from food. We eventually came home, and found an inflatable globe that had been donated; it will go to Mihai in October!

When the church was started, there was just one Christian family in the village, and 2 single ladies. Other families have started to come, especially the children, who enjoy the children's meetings and Sunday evenings. Some of these families were invited to our distribution of goods. Mihai's teenage sister was given a bed, so she no longer had to share with her little brother.



Mrs Gârleanu was the last of the Haret families to arrive at our distribution in Mărășești. She had 3 children, the youngest just a few weeks old. We had an unusual piece of furniture, a chest of drawers with a flip-over top that became a nappy changing table. It was just the right height. She was delighted to find that. After the backache of bending over to change the first 2 children, she was thrilled to find something to make life easier.

All the Haret families that attend the Baptist Church had been visited by the local Orthodox priest. He told them firmly not to go there, not to associate with Cris or any other Baptists. He threatened them with dire consequences if they did. The threats didn't stop any of them.

## Blizzard

**W**e normally go to Romania in April, October, and December, because those months are the closest to British weather; not too hot for comfort, and not too cold. This year we went later than usual, on 18th of April. On Thursday 20th, we woke up to find snow. It was falling heavily, and falling almost horizontally; the temperature was just 1 degree.



This photo of our premises (ground floor, brown doors and windows) was taken during a brief lull in the snowfall. It went on for 24 hours, with many power cuts and water cuts. At one stage the water was off for over 12 hours. We had thunder and lightning during the night. Snow had fallen over most of Hungary and all of Romania; we just happened to be under the worst of it.

Some people were without water for 4 days. Haret was without electricity for 3 days, and another village was without phones – mobile and landline – and internet, for 3 days. It wasn't the usual weather, and it wasn't easy. It certainly wasn't ideal weather for distribution of free goods to the poorest families in town, but we just had to get on with it. 45 families had been invited, and most came, regardless of the weather.

**Oana** used to work in a sawmill, and the sawdust caused severe lung problems. She also has a liver problem and the doctor has advised an operation; this would have to be paid for. Her son Marius has asthma. This family will always struggle because of their health problems. They didn't have any hot water system at home, so we were able to give



a Baby Burco boiler, so that Oana no longer needs to chop wood and make a fire in order to have hot water.

**Geta and Florin** had a house but the river had flooded it 4 times. Each time they repaired it, they had another flood. Finally the council gave them some (higher) land and they are now building a new house. It is a D-I-Y building, so may take a few years. They and their 2 children were all sleeping on one sofa-bed, just 4' wide (that's 1.20m) – all they had been able to salvage from the flood. We gave a single bed for their teenage son, leaving Geta, Florin, and their 3-year-old daughter on the sofa-bed.



**Petrica** has 2 boys, she had a job but was on maternity leave. Her husband was unemployed. She chose to take a strong wooden storage chest. Her 7-year-old son, Eduard, laughed when he saw the chest. We asked what was funny, and he gleefully told us that he would put his little brother in it – and shut the lid – when he cried too much! Somehow, I think Mum would intervene!



**Ana and Vasile** had one son, one room, and one bed. They had had a fire 4 years ago and are still rebuilding. They didn't seem to have a sense of urgency about it. They chose to take 3 chairs. Doors were available, but they said they were not ready for doors yet. When they are ready, we may not have any.

**Diana and Marius** had 2 children and another on the way. They live in one room that belongs to the sister of one of them. The sister is getting a little fed-up with her lodgers, and is strongly encouraging them to move out! They are building a house for themselves (slowly), and they were given 3 chairs, 2 doors, and 1 bed.



We find many families with next to no education. Often the parents can't read and this limits their job opportunities; maybe this is why we meet so many street-sweepers and grass-cutters. This time we also found a family who asked for a cupboard, but really wanted a chest of drawers. They didn't know the difference.

**Mareş** brought his 3 children, an 11-year-old girl and 2 younger boys. His wife had died whilst giving birth to David, so he is bringing the children up with some help from his sister. They had been sleeping on two sofa-beds, but because of the intense cold he had chopped up the oldest bed for firewood. They had no other way to keep warm. We gave another bed, and some plastic stacking chairs; they can't be chopped up.



We met **Cătălin and Dorina** again; we last saw this family 3 years ago when their eldest son had leukaemia and had to wear a mask whenever he left the house. He is now much better, mask-free, and has not needed any treatment for 2 months.

**Paula** had 4 children and her husband did not accompany her to our distribution. He would have loved to come, but was unable to, because he was in prison. He had cut firewood from the forest, and he didn't have a woodcutter's licence. He was caught by the police and sentenced to 2 years in prison. It was a first offence. Punishment is harsher in Romania than it is here.



**"Grandad"** brought 3 of his grandchildren. The invitation to our distribution had been sent to his son, but Grandad intercepted it. His son, Ionel, went to Portugal to find work. There just isn't enough work in Romania for all the people who need it. Ionel's wife also went to Portugal. Somehow the two of them fell foul of the law there, and both are in prison awaiting trial. The grandparents are looking after the children, but Grandad has not been told the nature of Ionel's crime. They have no idea what they have done wrong – a major crime, or simply misunderstanding the law in Portugal? We gave a bed.



## Can you help?

We are planning our next visit to Romania in October 2017, but we need the goods as soon as possible, and ideally by the **END OF AUGUST**. This allows us time to pack them and complete the paperwork which has to be done before every trip. Please don't leave goods until the last minute. We have more than enough to do in the last few weeks and it really doesn't help if we go there already exhausted!

### THESE THINGS CAN BE NEW OR SECONDHAND.....

**Bags** – shopping bags, rucksacks, holdalls, transparent plastic bags.

**Beds** – single, bunk, cot, sofa-bed, Z-bed – *must be clean and in good condition*. No double or king-size beds please.

**Bedding** – single and double, but double size is especially welcome because we never get enough of it. Sheets, especially flat sheets, pillows and pillow-cases, blankets, duvets, and duvet covers. Must be clean. No cot bedding; they don't have cots.

**Boots, shoes, slippers, sandals** – If used, must be sturdy, very clean and in good condition.

**Building materials** – doors, small windows, roofing, wood, and other simple materials for building houses. Also basic tools. Paint.

**Clothes for adults** – all sorts! Costume jewellery.

*Must be clean and in good condition.*

**Clothes for children over 3 years old – WE NEVER GET ENOUGH CLOTHES FOR CHILDREN!**

**Educational goods** – exercise books, pencils, pens, crayons.

**Furniture** – small furniture is sometimes useful; please phone and ask us because some furniture is not useful in Romania, and some does not travel well. Cupboards, chests of drawers, dining chairs and tables are needed.

**Household goods** – crockery, cutlery, saucepans (especially BIG pans), towels, rugs, irons, mirrors, clocks, spindriers, etc.

*Anything electrical must be in perfect working order.*

Christmas trees & decorations.

**Mattresses** – Standard sizes. Must be clean and in good condition.

**Medical** – wheelchairs, crutches, zimmer frames, walking sticks, plasters, bandages. *We can't take any kind of tablets, medicines, creams, etc.*

**Money** – without this, we cannot pay for the lorry to take all the other goods. Cash, cheques, (payable to LRCA), trust-fund vouchers etc.. If you are a tax-payer we can reclaim a further 25% of your donation from the Inland Revenue at no extra cost to you.

**Socks and tights** – we never get enough to meet the needs.

**Toys for children over 3 years old –**

Nothing that requires a knowledge of the English language.

Educational toys are particularly useful.

Must be clean, complete and in working order.

### THESE THINGS MUST BE NEW.....

**Clothes for children under 3 years old**

**Toiletries** – basic toiletries only. Soap, shampoo, conditioner, toilet rolls, sanitary towels, toothpaste, toothbrushes. **NO AEROSOLS.**

*Must be well within use-by date.*

**Toys for children under 3 years old**

**Underwear** – *must be new for ALL age groups.*

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## LRCA Committee

Chairman	Roger Amos
Vice-chairman	Dave Maskell
Secretary	Marvyn Amos
Minutes Secretary	Anne Kirkwood
Other member	Sharon Bridgeman

## Paul Lacatos

Paul is the 10-year-old son of a Baptist pastor in a Romanian city, and Paul's father is a friend of Cris. Paul was born with many bones missing from his hands and feet, and some joint problems.

He has already had eight operations and is now facing another. It will be in a hospital in Chişinău, Moldova, not Romania. Medical care must be paid for in Romania and Moldova, and the operation will cost 3000 euros, far beyond what the family can afford.

His home church has given money towards his expenses, Panciu Baptist has donated money and CVR, our Romanian charity, has also given money raised by the sale of goods in our charity shop. Next, LRCA will give some money for Paul.

Many people have to ask for help in Romania. There isn't any NHS, even for children.

## Bikes

**M**any people have told us that they would rather buy a secondhand bike from us than buy a new Romanian-made bike in another local shop. This is not because they want to help a charity; even after 10 years many people still don't understand that we *are* a charity shop! They have never seen one elsewhere and just cannot grasp the idea of giving the profit away. They want to buy from us because our bikes are generally a better quality than locally-made bikes.



Bikes are displayed in our back room at the shop, a room that we had built a few years ago because we were short of space. All bikes are serviced before they go to Romania, and they are checked and adjusted for each customer.

Bikes are used a lot by people who don't have a car and maybe don't need a big thing like a horse and cart. One man came to the shop and bought 4 plastic garden chairs. He then tied them on the back of his bike and pushed it home. Another man collected our unwanted bike boxes, tied them on his bike and pushed them home. There are several

people in town who collect old cardboard, take it to the recycling place about 12 miles away, and get money for it.

One very happy bike customer was Mariana, a girl we have known for many years. She grew up in care and had to leave at the age of 20. She found herself a job and a place to live – it's a shoebox-sized bedsit, very small and no kitchen but she is happy there. She had wanted a bike for a



long time and saved up for it. She was one of the first customers in the shop when we opened and found a bike the right size at the right price. She has made the most of it, taking advantage of the good weather. She has ridden it to Haret, and to the river Siret, one of the biggest rivers in Romania. With her upbringing, and no family contact whatsoever, she hasn't had a lot of happiness in her life, but she is happy now.

As I left the shop for the last time, just before we came home, I saw an extremely happy little girl in the park.

We also give some bikes free to people who need them in order to get to work. They have to prove a need.



## Roads

**M**any years ago we met a rather pompous government official who assured us that all the roads in Romania had tarmac. This was not true, and I could name many roads with just a mud surface. He didn't want to know.

On this trip we travelled to the north of Romania. We found the most atrocious road we have ever seen. The engineer responsible explained what had happened. The roadmenders had not been paid for the work they had done, tearing up 5km of road on one side of the road only – so that traffic could continue of the other side. So what did they do? They ripped up 10km of road, on both sides, in protest. We travelled at about ten kilometres an hour for 3 hours. At the end we had a wonderful view.



## Charity shop

**M**onday the first of May is a national Bank Holiday in Romania and many businesses are closed. Others stay open because they know that they will get customers who are otherwise at work and don't have the opportunity of coming. We were open. It was the first day of our summer season and we had plenty of customers. We were open for 3 hours and Lidia was taking about £300 an hour. It's not always like that; business diminishes day by day. This was a fairly normal first day.

Beds were sold during the week and taken away on a variety of transport; vans, pick-up trucks,



and horse-drawn carts.



We had a very big, comfortable easy chair; it was similar to a deckchair but with upholstery. A man came in and looked at it. We spoke to him....

*Us:* It's comfortable. Try it.

*Man:* Yes, very comfortable. Have you got two of them?

*Us:* No, it may be unique. Only one.

*Man:* If I go home with a chair for me and not the wife, she'll never forgive me!

Then a few seconds hesitation, and he said, "Here's the money!". We have no record of what his wife said to him when he got home!

Doll's houses were popular. We don't take these very often, but on this occasion we had three and they sold within minutes. We need more!



Every afternoon Lidia and Mioara needed to open more boxes and refill the shelves and rails. Unlike a British charity shop, which often has to record only the expensive items, in Romania every little thing must be written down in a very large record book. It can't be done on the computer, it must be all hand-written.



Some people have to save up; two ladies looked at our conservatory set and said how much they liked it. It sat in the shop window for three weeks, then one came back and bought it.

Last winter the shop was warm for the first time ever. Gas central heating had been put in and it drew more customers in ... for a warm-up! Many shops are unheated, even in sub-zero temperatures. In the summer, a switch will change the heater to an air-conditioner.