

## A Year in the Arc

I had first visited Romania in 2004 on a music tour with Wigan Youth Jazz Orchestra. Eleven months later, after completing my music degree, I was on a plane heading back to Romania, to work on the Epiphany Trust's pilot project *The Arc*.

I had just one week to settle in the house before the arrival of four young people from an orphanage in Lugoj. A very timid Ana Maria, an excited Adam and Codruta, and a nervous Darie arrived in Sinaia on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2005. This was going to be a huge change to their lives. All four had been abandoned as infants and had never known life outside institutional care.



The start was hard – as it is with any new project or task. The four young adults were accompanied by an educator from the orphanage. I had ten days to learn as much as I could from her. My biggest problem was that I spoke no Romanian and she no English. Yet with help from the manager, we coped. My first task was to gain the trust of the four young adults and to teach life skills – step by step. Skills such as how to wash and groom themselves were of paramount importance. Other skills to be taught were how to set a

table, how to clean and how to keep a house tidy. We take these things for granted, but they were very alien to these young people when they first arrived at The Arc.

Due to their disabilities, a lot of repetition was needed in order for them to remember a routine yet after the first two months, everything seemed to slot into place. The four gradually became self sufficient and began doing most things for themselves.

Looking back to those early months, there are many fond memories which stick in my mind. Codruta was in amazement at the fact that she could have a shower to herself and stay in there as long as she liked with her own shampoo. They were all so used to sharing showers in the orphanage and having a maximum of 5 minutes in there. When Darie discovered the plug to the bath for the first time he squealed with excitement as he ran the taps and filled up the bath.

Although he had been several times to a small swimming pool, he had never had a bath in 19 years! Ana Maria was a delight to look after and she taught me Romanian. One of her birthday presents from *Epiphany* was a framed picture of her taken on an early aid visit to the orphanage when she was just 3 years old. She had never seen a photo of herself as a small child before, and 7 months later it still remains on her bedside and is her most treasured possession.



Adam has loved television all his life, yet at the orphanage there is one TV between twenty children. It didn't take long to notice that he was extremely short-sighted yet did not have glasses. This we rectified. The fact that he could now watch TV and properly see the screen for the first time made him very happy. When we got a video and DVD player in the house he was over the moon.

By the time I came to leave *The Arc* and Romania at the start of July 2006, the four young adults were fully equipped to look after their own home. They set the table,



washed and dressed themselves, made and changed their own beds. They can Hoover, polish, iron and clean bathrooms meticulously. They look after the gardens, take out the rubbish, and help with the daily shopping and cooking. Not only do they do these jobs well, but they also enjoy helping, and take great pride in looking after their own home.

The progress they have made in just a year is remarkable and our next step is to now help them find employment.

The experience I had in Romania was truly remarkable, and the love and affection which the four young adults gave me cannot be put into words. The experience will remain with me forever, and I will take every opportunity to visit them as they continue to grow and develop. They are now a big part of my life.

Sharon Noon  
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