

CONVOY **REPORT**

LITHUANIAN CONVOY SEPTEMBER 2012



JO LOVE "WHAT IS THE BEST MESSAGE WE CAN TAKE BACK HOME?"

What do you most want us to say to people about what you are doing here?"

We were in the midst of discussion over lunch when I chose to put this bold question through our translator to Irina, the Director of the Pabadre Children's Care Home, our first place of delivery.

It would be remiss of us not to start with a big thank you to Royal Mail an BT who supplied all the vehicles and fuel cards and the assistance they give CWUHA along with Simpson Millar, Eircom and Anpost. Also thanking all the convoy drivers and supporters who fundraise in various ways so that we able to take first class aid direct to the needy.

Without you all we could not do what we do and deliver a 'Smile to a Child'

Irina had already made an impression as a woman who would welcome bold questions. As soon as the unloading of aid was done, we were taken on tour through the enormous building, previously a school and also at one time a hospital, now home to 50 cared-for young people aged 5-18. Most of them are there because they have parents whose drug or alcohol addictions or other problems mean their capacities for parenting are inadequate. This reality makes all the more important the skills taught in the care home – young people can learn cooking, housekeeping, money management and more, building up their confidence for independent living when they leave the care home at the age of 18 or 21. These teaching sessions are open to nonresidents too. In Lithuania you won't see the screaming poverty like other parts of Eastern Europe,

we'd been told. Lithuania has reached another level, we'd been told. The rooms and corridors of Pabadre would nonetheless have been condemned by any remotely diligent Health & Safety team looking with the eyes of UK expectation. Cleanliness, colour and cheerfulness, some bright new furniture, these could not be faulted, but look more closely and there was the tired cracking plasterwork, the shabby doors, the patchy and peeling wallpaper, the ancient plumbing, the dodgy electrics.

The few children and teens we met were shy and reticent with us, but clearly had a fantastic rapport with staff. The one moment when enthusiasm suddenly swept away shyness was in the art room, where one girl showed off her own work from the tables laden with freshly fired clay items – jugs, vases, plates, animals, >>



CHECK OUT WARREN MOORES BLOG OF THE FULL LITHUANIAN CONVOY

<http://cwu-ha2012.blogspot.co.uk/2012/09/welcome.html?m=0>

CWUHA September 2012 blog that I created to document our journey across Europe to deliver humanitarian aid to a day centre in Lithuania. After months of fundraising, buying aid, passing a HGV driving test, plenty of organising and packing, the time came to finally get going. The lead up to a convoy is already an emotional journey - check out my blog to find how that journey continued.!!

Warren Moores

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>> decorative tiles. This was not the first sign of artistic creativity, as downstairs on the long corridor walls were painted murals, all done by the young people themselves.

As some of our wish lists had indicated, with requests for art materials, we saw the huge extent to which arts and crafts activities are valued and offered to cared-for young people, for pleasure, for education, for relaxation and also for therapy. At Pabadre we saw the dedicated psychologist's room, where writing and drawings from recent sessions adorned the wall. Perhaps this is part of the 'other level' which has been reached, but how much more is still needed.

It was a similar story at Utena, a smaller centre accommodating 22 young people but also with space for at-risk families to be supported together. This was clearly a 'flagship' centre in the region, perhaps even nationally, yet still when the norm you know is the comparison you inevitably bring, there is a palpable starkness no matter the improved décor and fabric. Again we had the opportunity to speak with staff, and to hear how the house caters for its residents, and also be given a sketch of the social and political background which gives cause for deeply felt frustrations.

There was cynicism about aspects of government, but never despair about the day to day life of the centre. Whatever the detail lost in translation, the vigorous hand gestures, tones of lament and sudden tears said it all - the passion, the commitment, the caring.

For some of the team, the one Lithuanian phrase that will stick with us is “Duok Ranka”, the name of the children's day centre in Vilnius. Forget the huge ex-hospital-sized complex, or even the more modest and modern purpose-built home. We walked a pedestrian path of the city suburbs among small five storey high tower blocks. Around the next unassuming corner, our two guides and staff members said, “We're here.” It was no more than a single ground floor flat. Two day rooms, two bedrooms, an office, kitchen and toilet. Some basic furniture and lino floors that had seen better days. “As you can see, we don't have much, but we try to make it good for the children.”

Every day it's open house as the three staff, all young women, invest their all in this tiny corner of a city, simply wanting and trying to make life a bit brighter for the children they know and love. Every day they welcome at least 20-25 kids who spend time here before school or after school and often both, seeking what home life is unable to provide. Some have nowhere else peaceful enough to concentrate on homework. Some have nowhere else to play. Some need fed. Some need to sleep. Some need to talk. Some need to feel safe for a while. Some need to curl up with a book or a teddy and do nothing.

The 'official' funding for this project is 100 Euros per month, which can only be spent on food. For everything else, survival depends on charitable giving. It's an uphill struggle constantly. “We often feel we are creating something from nothing – the next

dinner, a special cake, something nice for the children to do.”

It was the happiest and saddest of aid unloadings. The main day room, office, kitchen and tiny back corridor were soon crammed with boxes. Ironically, the children were going to have to be turned away for a day while things were unpacked and organised! We were told they would be blown away when they saw everything that came out of the boxes and realised it was pure gift. The staff themselves were already excited at the possibilities raised by the fact that for some time to come, funds would be released from expenditure on the household and maintenance items included in our aid. “We will be able to take them for a trip to the beach!” “We might all get to the theatre!” “We will go and visit interesting places together!” If you ever doubt what a half pallet of washing powder can do...it can give children back what childhood is meant to be.

It was in the midst of all the busy to-ing and fro-ing from the truck that I saw the large stone on the porch table, painted gold, with “Duok Ranka” overlaid in green lettering. I asked Dovine, “Is it just a name or does it mean something?” She smiled. “It means 'give a hand'.”

Later, once unloaded, refreshed, informed and regrouped in the sunshine, I was close to the front door as we waited for the staff to lock up. There seemed a slight delay. I was about to stick my head back in and see if they were coming when a sound from within stopped me. Great gulping sobs. One of our dear new friends was

“As you can see, we don't have much, but we try to make it good for the children.”



simply overwhelmed by the help they were being given. Paparciai was in contrast to all of this – a big house with an extension under way, in a tiny village out in the sticks, set in its own grounds with tumbledown sheds, a grassy play area and a big fruitful garden. And what a welcome! School day or not, the kids were there to meet us, standing proudly in line holding giant paper hearts, along with a 'Welcome' poster featuring a purple artic with a blue cab, yellow tinted windscreen, red deflector and orange star wheel trims – it was even driving on the left - we fancy one for next convoy!

The truck delivering here managed to cause quite a sensation despite its plain whiteness. When we saw that the entrance road was undergoing reconstruction, and that the supposedly drivable half of the road was currently nothing but deep, soft sand... our hearts sank, quickly followed by the empty wagon which went ahead and tested the ground! A few hauls from a JCB cleared the way for the fully loaded vehicle to try its luck, with triumph or tragedy hanging in the balance for women drivers the world over. It must have been the polar bear mascot – no sweat!

The Paparciai wish list had included a request for bikes, but as the tailgate came down, not a bike was to be seen anywhere. The children clamoured round to help with carrying boxes, until the row of strapped-in yorkies was reached. Their offloading suddenly

revealed the secret stash! That was it, no more helpers! Whoops of joy went up with each of the 30-plus bikes being eagerly dived on and whizzed away! As we finally left the emptied truck to go indoors for coffee and cake, the shrieks of delight carried on from outside as the kids zoomed up and down.

These moments are just unbeatable, priceless...

The Director of the Paparciai Children's Home has worked there for 12 of its 15 years so far. 29 children and teenagers are accommodated, all with living relatives but again, due to dysfunctional home situations they are in care. Like all the other staff we had met, those at Paparciai described their roles as 'surrogate parents' and showered affection without caution or reservation. And it was amazing to see how the older teens looked out for and looked after the toddlers. A group of boys of mixed age decided the bikes would be there tomorrow, and off they went to help each other enjoy the thrill of the moment, a truck cab! One enterprising little soul, however, spotted a different treasure from our gifts, and put it to good use all by himself. He may always have felt a height disadvantage for shooting at the basketball net high up on the shed wall, so he invented a new combination sport – trampoline basketball! The rest of the afternoon had us all running around in an impromptu football game of sorts, with one young girl >>

SPECIAL THANKS TO

The leaders of this convoy Steve and Ian, on making this trip so successful, drawing on the strengths and supporting all who took part. Thank you to 'Save the Children Lithuania' for facilitating the convoy leaders and drivers.

CONVOY DRIVERS

Leaders: Ian Young and Steve Rowlands
Alison Chatto and Warren Moores
Katy Low and Joanna Love
Robert Bracelin and Stephen McGauley
Philip Ward and John Strachan
Rory Duggan and Donal Gormley
Francis Banks and Brian Rudman
Michael Pitt and Keith Archibold
Paul O'Neill and Michael Strick



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>> keeping us energised with endless supplies of raspberries from the garden!
These snapshots are from four of the eight projects we donated aid to on this trip. All of them were well worth supporting and, as ever on convoy, taught us so much about what is happening in other places. It is still barely 20 years since the KGB left Lithuania and many people will tell you that the national psyche is still in recovery from the dark days of Soviet occupation. Whether there are causal links with the high incidence of particular social problems is less clear, but alcoholism and teenage pregnancy especially are proving hard to tackle and reduce. Children are taken into care for reasons common to many other places, not least the UK, but the frequent breakdown of fostering is in Lithuania a compounding issue. Staff

at the centres we visited told how many families begin fostering children "for the money, everything is for the money", rather than with an understanding and commitment to what fostering will mean. Many children go through revolving doors of family, fostering, care home, time and time again.

So the self-named surrogate parents keep on keeping on. On behalf of all her colleagues in similar situations, with the same passion, the same struggles and the same commitment, Irina's reply says it all.

**"What is the best message we can take back home?
What do you most want us to say to people about what you are doing here?"**

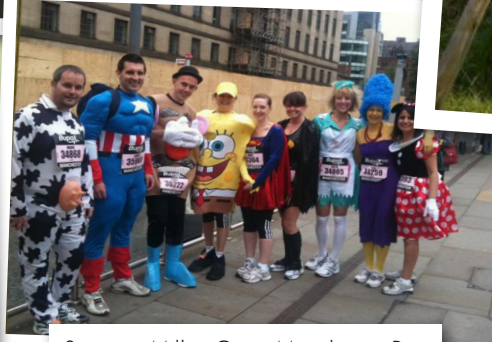
"We are trying to make these young lives better."

HOW YOU CAN HELP US BRING A SMILE TO A CHILD!

JOGLE, Lands End to John O'Groats



Northumbria Police Cyclists C2C & John O'Groats to Lands End



Simpson Miller, Great Manchester Run



Lonmynd, Shropshire Hyke



FUNDRAISING - These are some of our supporters that have fundraised for us in various ways - Massive thank you to all.

We can't do what we do, without you.

UPCOMING FUNDRAISING EVENTS IN AID OF CWUHA CONVOYS!

Carl and Chris Webb will be running Manchester 10k 2013

<http://www.justgiving.com/Carlandchris10kchallenge>

Craig Lewis and Mark Potter will be running the Cardiff Half Marathon in October 2013

Check out the website www.cwuha.org for updated news on events, fundraising ideas and convoys