

## CWU Humanitarian Aid

### September 2018 Convoy Report

From learning you have to be selected as a convoy driver it's a mad dash to raise the funds needed. The majority of our money was raised through work. We work in quite a small HUB with just over 100 full time staff and so we needed to get creative. Our site runs a tuck shop with all the money going to charity and so for the 6 months before we went the CWUHA received half of the money raised. We did a sponsored hair dye where people bought raffle tickets and the winner could choose the colour and we ran a bake sale. All the money raised through Parcelforce we were able to double through Royal Mails charity scheme.



Once we had raised the money the next step was to buy the items on our wish list. We emailed every major company we could think of, we got emails saying no, emails saying they were sorry but they have their own charity partners and some didn't reply at all. What we soon realised, was that we were more likely to get discounts off local companies than national ones. We received discounts off laptops from a company in Manchester, free sports balls from a local company and a free dryer from B&Q in Kendal.



The week before we left we received the van from royal mail and once that's loaded with the aid it was just the small task of driving 2,000 miles. The first day we drive to Hull Depot to meet our fellow drivers and fuel up ready for the trip ahead. We then drive to the port and got on the overnight ferry to Zeebrugge in Belgium. Once we docked it was all systems go as you try and make as much ground as possible driving into Germany, from there it's on to Hungary, Hungary to Romania and then finally Romania to Moldova.

Unfortunately for us a 4 day drive turned into 5 as one of our vans broke down as we crossed the Border into Romania. This meant that we arrived in Moldova a day later than planned which made for a pretty packed schedule in country.

Credit to the drivers of the van that broke down, once we realised it would take more than a day to fix, they transhipped their load onto a hire van and made it to the Moldovan border only 3 hours behind the rest of the convoy, driving part way through the night to catch up.

Our first day in Moldova was spent at the Phoenix centre, a centre set to cater to children with disabilities. We were greeted by the children dragged over for a quick game of football and then went straight to unloading and swapping the aid around as the vans were going to different places to deliver aid. We then split into two groups heading towards vulnerable families in local villages. This was our first experience seeing that kind of poverty and it led to a quiet van on the way back with no one really knowing what to say.

The next day we spent the morning in a children's hospital in Balti. The first



thing you notice when walking in is the smell, the next thing you notice is the absolute lack of technology that we so rely on such as heart rate monitors and IV stands. It was then back to the hotel for a quick shower and then we were being taken to a fundraiser for the children at the Phoenix Centre. They had children from local villages singing and dancing, and the

children from the Centre also took part themselves. After a meal they held a raffle for items that they had made with all the money going towards trips out to the theatre etc.

The Friday was spent delivering aid in Chisinau, the capital city. We started off at a disabled centre that looks after children that have been abandoned. It



was quite an emotional experience seeing how severe some of the children's disabilities were, purely from lack of knowledge on how to care for them. We then went to a



sports orphanage where we were given a tour and shown pictures of famous athletes that had trained there. You couldn't help but be drawn in to how proud the

people were and when you saw what they had to work with it was hard not to be impressed. Finally we went to a school where each child received a box with clothing, toiletries, school supplies and toys. All the children there could speak basic English saying Hello and thank-you.

The Saturday was supposed to be a day off, however, with us arriving a day late some of the drivers still had aid to deliver and a few of us decided to join them to get the whole experience. We went to a village about an hour away from the centre delivering aid to more vulnerable families and were guided by the town's mayor who kept expressing his gratitude and laid out some food and drinks for us before we headed back.

With only 4 out of 16 drivers having taken part in a convoy before many of us who were unsure what to expect and I think everybody got upset by something at some point. It was a tiring and emotional experience but amazingly rewarding. It makes a massive difference having gone through the whole process of raising the money, buying the aid, loading the van and driving the 2000 miles out there to be able to hand a box over to a family in need and know you've made a small difference. I don't think any of us would have changed the experience and the majority of us will be applying to do it again. It just leaves me say thank you to the many people and organisation which made this special experience possible. ParcelForce, Royal Mail, CWUHA, B&Q and of course my workmates who helped me with fundraising and manifesting the aid for my vehicle.



Becky Crook

Convoy Volunteer.