



“Goodbye Ascensium”

When Mandy and Steve moved to Romania, there was no thought of them setting up a Charity in Romania. They were funded by their UK Charity – Hawkesley Christian Romania Trust - to enable them to work in Sibiu for five years. However, such was the pace of development of their work that in 1994 a sister organisation, ‘Asociatia Trustul Crestin – Hawkesley’, was launched in Sibiu. This was a requirement of the Romanian authorities so that the work could continue to be done legally. It was a proud moment when we finally received the permission from the courts and we were on our way.

The name changed to Ascensium after a couple of years at the request of the staff (not least because the original name wasn’t half a mouthful when answering the telephone), whom we employed and the work progressed. Fifteen years later we can be very proud of our achievements, the vast majority of which you have read about regularly in our newsletters.

As you will all be well aware the last couple of years have proved very difficult in terms of finding funding for Ascensium. Romania entered the EU in 2007 and the world began to assume that Romania no longer needed help. We knew then, and still do know, that this is not the case. We have frequently tried to access EU funding streams without success, due to various political and bureaucratic issues in Romania – it is out there somewhere but the usual Romanian cocktail of bureaucracy and corruption have made it seemingly impossible to access. Additionally Ascensium has frequently succeeded in being an enabling charity, with many of our staff have leaving and moving on to better (or at least better paid) jobs. So the time came to make a decision, and this decision was finally taken at the Trustees (of SHARE) meeting on November 8th.

On November 15th and then again on December 6th Mandy went to Sibiu to discuss the closure of Ascensium and set the wheels in motion for this to happen. The remaining staff - Cristiana, Nuti, Lica and Mrs Luci were sad but prepared for, and positive about, the future. They feel a good job has been done, that they have personally gained a lot, and now they too are ready for a new start.



So what will happen to the projects?

Ante natal programmes

One of the main aims of this part of our work was to prevent the abandonment of babies and the good news is that the hospital in Sibiu now has no babies abandoned there. That this has been achieved is largely accredited to us. The hospital now has “Baby Friendly” status supported by UNICEF and is obliged to run ante natal courses. Ascensium, therefore, was able to stop this strand of work this autumn.

Educational/Social Support

The schools and the children are very sad that this has come to an end but the good news is that some work will continue through SHARE. Even better is the excellent news relating to the early years programme, in that there is a MA option being run through Sibiu University in Partnership with University College (Newman), in Early Years Education.

Holiday Clubs

Will continue through SHARE but those facilitating them will liaise directly with Schools in Romania rather than work through Ascensium. Trafford are sending another group which will work through schools in Rosia, Vurpar & Nou this summer.

Downs Syndrome project “Open Eyes”

Sylvia is continuing this project after Christmas as a volunteer and has been given a room by the special school in Sibiu in which to hold her sessions.

Psychological Counselling

Vasile continues both to work as a counsellor and undertake his specialist training. He still hopes to open his own practice in the future. He left us in May but we keep in touch.

Cross of Nails – This is an area started by us and further developed by Gill and Geoff Kimber. The Cross of Nails itself has now found what we hope will be its permanent resting place in the Johanneskirche in Sibiu. This church is very much a student church and is at the heart of most things good which happen ecumenically in Sibiu. We like to think that we had a major role to play in this in its early days, and we are hoping that the project will be further developed and that Coventry Cathedral (from whence the Cross of Nails originates) will become more involved in the future. This is an exciting development.

What about the staff!?

Nuti – has been with us for 15 years, taking care of our children and working with Ascensium. She wants to have a bit of a rest and find a job she likes, she says she has “learnt to manage in the world and is very grateful for everything

Ascensium has offered her". A big thank you for all her loyalty, hard work and friendship.

Lica – has been with us also for 15 years and apart from a break when he went to do national service in the army, has worked on the house, acted as chauffeur, decorated, moved furniture, helped in schools and with holiday clubs, etc... he now hope to retrain as a professional driver, coaches, HGV etc.. and see where he goes from there. Again, a big thank you for his loyalty and commitment to us all.

Cris – has worked with us in early years for 2 years, she has completed her degree in linguistics and already has a job translating at a Notariat from January, she has been well received by kindergartens around Sibiu and has influenced change for the better in Early years teaching. She hopes to continue to help SHARE workers who visit Sibiu, as do Nuti & Lica.

Alex – left us in November for a job as a Jurist (paralegal) with a big Transport firm. Although he was Ascensium's nurse only for a few months, he was extremely well liked by both the team and those he helped. We wish him well.

Aurelia- is still on maternity leave with her babies who are doing well. She can then think to the future and with her excellent qualifications and experience she will do well. Good luck to her.

Last but not least - Mrs Luci

Mrs Luci has been with us from the start; she has been our accountant, administrator of late, and great friend. Along with her daughter Carmen (a high-flying accountant in Bucharest), they have kept the local Financial Department happy by keeping the accounts of ATCH-s and now Ascensium in excellent condition. Luci was with me when we registered the organisation in 1994 after much running around to get the various approvals for its inauguration. She has now found herself at the end, doing just the same sort of running around in order to dissolve the organisation. However we feel it is fitting for her to do this and very timely; her very hard work at this time and support to all has been excellent. She can now look forward to a happy and healthy retirement. Thank you.

Last word

Personally we would like to thank all of those people that have supported the work of Ascensium over the years and contributed in their own special way. The overall feeling is that we were a success and got most of it right most of the time. Of course we got it wrong on occasion but the ups and downs, chaos and disappointments are part of everyday Romanian life and we got through them. It has been extremely rewarding to know that to the lives of many hundreds and thousands children & families have been improved because of the difference made by Ascensium. Somewhere someone (and lots of them, really) will have a different life because of us – for the better.

Romania must not be forgotten, as we enter a period of recession so do they and for Romanians it can mean life or death, not just whether or not they can afford a holiday this year. Please continue to pray for them and where you can continue to support through SHARE – which will continue to support the people of Romania in the future through targeted project work.

To those of you that are supporting us at the moment either individually, or through a church, school or organisation such as St Peter's Wisborough Green Sussex (who have chosen SHARE for their charity this year), all we can ask is that you please continue to support. All funds will continue to go directly to help the people of Romania as before, albeit in a slightly different way. We thank you again for your support.

New arrangements-

All enquiries from now onwards need to go to Mrs Jane Williams (Trustee and Professional advisor for many years) on janeMLWill@aol.com or 26, Styvechale Road Coventry Warwickshire CV5 6ND Tel 02476679671. Jane and I are in close contact so she is fully up to date with SHARE business and has been to Romania every year for 15 years, raised lots of money and supported me. The old address will no longer be valid. However I am still available until Jan 31st when we hand over fully.

So what of Family Hughes in Romania

19 years ago in January we started our involvement in Romania, we moved to live in Sibiu in 1991, for five years, and never set out to start a charity. But we did, and we couldn't count and we stayed 10 years and have continued to work for Sibiu & Romania since our return to UK. We will continue to do so. There is still much to be done but on a more individual basis. I will have a break first. Steve has a new job as Inter-faith Officer for Churches Together in Lancashire, Adina is in her final year at college doing A levels and Ben his last year at School doing GCSE's. Romania is part of us and who we are and will remain so.



A few final snippets of recent Romanian news.

At the end of November Romania held parliamentary elections. The turn out (bearing in mind a thousand people or more died in 1989 to bring about the freedom to have free and democratic elections) was really poor and only about 40% of those who were entitled to vote did so. Romania is once again,

therefore, entering into the troubled waters of coalition government. Mircea Geona, leader of the Social Democratic Party (reconstituted or not so reconstituted communists) called it a historical moment when they joined forces with their sworn enemies, the Democratic and Liberal parties to form a majority government. Historical it may be, selling souls to the devil is a phrase that also springs to mind! Geona says that after twenty years when two political forces hitherto apparently irreconcilable, have joined together it is proof that 'we have grown up...' We shall see. The new parliament is hoped to become effective (ha ha) from December 22nd.

So having been presented with this sort of somewhat unholy alliance the President of Romania (whose post was not up for re-election this year) Traian Basescu had to choose a new prime Minister. This he did and appointed Theodor Stolojan, leader of the Democratic Liberal Party and Prime Minister for a season in the 1990's, to the post. Stolojan accepted, said all the right things about national unity, blah, blah blah and promptly resigned about four days later. So (unless things have changed again today) the new Romanian Prime Minister is Emil Boc, leader of the Liberal Party and Mayor of Cluj. His total national political experience? Approximately nil as far as I can see. Please continue to pray for Romania for it certainly needs prayer as much as ever!

However, and on a more positive note, although Romania, like the rest of the world is suffering from the good old 'credit crunch' it is still faring better than most. For sure sales of new cars are down and investment is reducing but, and it is a very big and positive but, in Q3 (quarter three of this financial year) Romania enjoyed the highest rate of economic growth of any of the 27 EU member states with a rise of 9.1% over the same quarter in 2007. The international accountants and financiers, Merrill Lynch are forecasting a slow down for 2009 but still expect economic growth in Romania of between 3.9% - 4.5%. I guess these figures demonstrate two things. The first is how far down Romania really was twenty years ago that even now in time of global recession they can still experience economic growth, and the second is that there must be some good things happening there for growth to exist.

More economic news is that the annual inflation rate, which has been measured in hundreds of percentage points on some occasions since 1989 is now running at 6.06% for the first eleven months of 2008. This again is good news.

Many of you will have heard of the Shengen agreement whereby signatory countries allow transit of people through their borders without further passport controls once they have entered the Shengen zone. As far as I am aware this agreement begins at Austria and once people are through passport control there they can travel freely in all other Shengen countries. The next time they need get their passport out is if they try and enter into UK (not a Shengen country). There is now talk that by 2011 the outer edge of the Shengen agreement from the Eastern side will be Romania. This is an interesting idea and subject to EU scrutiny and approvals, but it would have been unthinkable not too many years ago. How times have changed.

Finally many of you will know that football is a great game spoiled by big money. OK the scale is different but the same principle applies in Romania. Historically there have only been two major teams in Romania Steaua and Dinamo. Now a new kid has arrived on the block after spending a whole load of money (roubles I think) on the team and this is CFR Cluj, who have just been knocked out of the champions league and who won the Romanian championship last year. The owner of Steaua, Gigi Becali (businessman extraordinaire...!) didn't like the fact that Steaua once again were not top of the league as in former times. So he sacked Marius Lacatus the manager. Now this was only about two months ago saying that he was no good and his team had no chance with him in charge. He appointed Daniel Munteanu as new head coach. Guess what. Steaua still aren't top and Becali has declared that his team will never do anything with Munteanu in charge. So he sacked him and replace him with...? Marius Lacatus of course who suddenly, two months after being sacked, has become the answer to all Becali's prayers (if he says any). If you thought the machinations of English football were bad, then spare a thought for some of those caught up in Romanian football.

Anyway, that's enough frivolity and we return to the main thrust of this news letter which is simply that Romania still needs help, and SHARE will still seek to provide it albeit in a different way to that of the last fourteen years, and if SHARE still needs to help Romania then we still need you to help SHARE.



So for Christmas 2008 **La Multi Ani, Craicun Fericit si sanatate tuturor Romanii, va multumim.** (To many years, Happy Christmas and health to all Romanians, we thank you)

The same to you and all of our supporters!