



# JACOB'S WELL APPEAL

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"Whosoever drinketh of the water I shall give him shall never thirst; but this water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing into everlasting life." John 4.14

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## Opportunities for Short Term and Gap Year Voluntary Work in Romania

### Background

Work in Siret in the north of Romania with handicapped young people began at the end of the Communist era with the fall of Ceausescu. It was initially based in a "Neuropsychiatric" Hospital there which contained some 500 young people and children of all ages. It was understaffed with local women working as carers. The residents came from all over Romania. They were dressed in rags and many had severe deformities from lying in the same position untended for long periods. Many of the children lacked human stimulation and had no contact from relatives. Some had learning difficulty, some were physically handicapped and some had psychiatric disorders such as autism. They lacked basic emotional and social skills and had impaired impulse control. There was minimal education on site though some of the older children were able to go to residential trade school some distance away. In addition there were similar children in local villages whose families often keep them hidden out of shame, or because they feared they might be taken away and put in institutions and for whom there is no provision.

### The Rehabilitation Unit.



*A View of the New Extension at the Siret Rehabilitation Unit*

The hospital was closed in 2001 and the children were mostly transferred to smaller units nearer their homes with better facilities. However there was no provision for the young adults over 18, who had never had any opportunity to develop ordinary social skills or independence. The town orphanage was taken over and about 180 of these young people, now mostly in their 20's were transferred there. This orphanage has no facilities or occupational or recreational activities and is like a prison.

Jacob's Well has therefore opened a Rehabilitation Unit for 12 young people - 8 boys and 4 girls to help some of the young people towards independence. When they first arrived they had no personal belongings, had not used a knife or fork and had no idea how to fit into ordinary society. Now that they have privacy and individual attention and guidance they have made astonishing progress and most have been able to obtain jobs locally and are beginning to reach the point where they are ready to become independent and take their place in the local community. One has now married and left and with the help of Jacob's Well and his earnings has been able to obtain a cottage where he lives with his wife and baby. In addition some of the young people from the orphanage attend on a daily basis.

The unit is staffed by Romanians but there is also scope for volunteers from other countries to work in the unit with the young people helping them to find new interests and activities and offering them friendship, guidance and encouragement.

### **Volunteers**

Volunteers must be at least 18 years old and in good health. They usually stay with Romanian families or in the Rehab Centre. The culture, attitudes and eating patterns are all different to those in England. Siret is quite remote (250 miles from Bucharest) and modern facilities such as telephones, transport, water supply and indoor toilets are only now being fully developed. The climate is continental with wide temperature swings with hot summers and very cold winters. Life is much more traditional in rural Romania than most of Britain and it is necessary for volunteers to be prepared to adhere to local behavioural expectations if they are to win the respect and confidence of the local community.

Many young people have made a valuable contribution in Siret during part of a gap year before or after university in the past. Older people with experience especially in education, healthcare or social work field have also been able to come for shorter periods of time and made a valuable contribution. Whilst an aptitude for languages is an advantage (especially French) the young people and staff mostly have a working understanding of English.

Volunteers pay their own expenses. The return air fare from the UK is usually around £200 plus taxes. Accommodation, bed and breakfast which can be arranged for you in advance usually costs about £30 per week to which needs to be added any money required for personal needs. Some volunteers have been able to secure sponsorship (eg from their local church, rotary club etc.).

If you interested in proceeding we shall need to confirm that you are suitable. Please let us know if you would like us to send you an application form. We will also need confirmation from your doctor that your health is satisfactory. We need to know more about you and your previous interests and activities and will require a copy of your C.V. and the names and addresses of two referees. If all this proves to be satisfactory you will be invited to a meeting to provide information and discuss requirements. This usually takes place in Beverley when a decision can be made as to whether you should join our team in Siret.

Jacob's Well also sends medicines and medical equipment, clothes and other relief supplies to many countries in Eastern Europe and Asia. Romania is the only country at present where we have residential volunteers on a fairly regular basis.

If you are interested in this work and would like further information or an application form please let us know. If possible please ring between 9 and 12 in the morning. Thank you for expressing interest in our work.