

# NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2004

**Welcome to our very occasional newsletter!**

Following our fact-finding mission to Albania last summer we unexpectedly managed to squeeze in an extra autumn convoy to Ukraine, and we arrived in time for celebrations of the first birthday of the youth group *Our Generation*. The party included their HIV-awareness theatre performances, and fantastic music and comedy devised by the kids themselves.

I was amused and surprised to find they're very fond of Scottish culture, and we very much want to obtain a full kilt outfit for them to use as a costume!

We spent time talking about what they need from us in future. At last, I believe we've overcome their fears about asking for more than simply our friendship. Their experiences of the corrupt bureaucracy which traditionally pervaded their country had left them convinced that no "official partner" can also be a friend. Breaking through this is a success in itself.

Meanwhile, music promoter Nic Briscoe was deeply moved by the people he met when he came with us in November 2003. He went back in March this year to work with musicians and a dance troupe, with a view to supporting their efforts and holding a concert next year featuring local Ukrainian bands and some musicians from the UK. A third trip in September consolidated his resolve. His energetic efforts led to two fantastic benefit nights last winter, and another in November (2004) at the *Joogleberry Playhouse* in Brighton. Please see his website, [www.a-live.org.uk](http://www.a-live.org.uk), for details and dates of further events in the future. We also plan to give UK musicians the chance to travel to Ukraine and work (and play!) directly with the young people who are putting in place an independent music scene!



**Above:** Children at the Berezna school (for children with learning difficulties and mental illnesses) wearing the special uniforms of their woodwork classes. These are the classes which benefit from tools and equipment donated by UK companies.



Our main convoy in April this year delivered another consignment computers to the youth group which they will use for their newspaper and for preparing sound-tracks for their HIV-awareness theatre projects. We also visited Slavutich, the town hurriedly built to house people evacuated from Chernobyl.

On the way home, halfway across Ukraine, we accidentally met actor Ewan McGregor on his way to New York – the long way round! His team visited UNICEF projects on the way, including at Chernobyl. It's great to see new groups of people helping there!

Returning to the subject of Albania and the water bore-hole project, I was delighted that £4000 was raised for this at a second *Canvas* art raffle. Clean water really is desperately important, and we need a bigger single sum of cash than we've ever had to raise before: an estimated £9000. The engineering-based project is a significant expansion for us, but it's completely justified if only by the fact that if we don't help, the residents will have many years to wait before their government – or anybody else – takes an interest.

*Kieran Turner, Co-ordinator*

**Left, above:** Building a climbing frame with kids at Zamglai orphanage – putting the pieces together took considerable force!  
**Below:** A few of the musicians at "Our Generation" enjoying trying out the first of the guitars we recently gave them.

## About ALBANIA – and why we work there...

The republic of Albania is one of the least-known countries of Europe, in no small part due to the isolationist dictatorships it endured during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. First there was the fascist government of King Zog, then Nazi influence, and latterly the so-called communist regime of dictator Enver Hoxha.

When state communism collapsed across Europe, the almost anarchic Albania embraced a semi-official pyramid investment scheme, and by the mid 1990s practically every person was bankrupt. After that many government facilities were looted, and now it is no exaggeration to say that several people in every village will have old army Kalashnikov rifles and other munitions. We have been offered these lethal guns by teenage boys several times!

Since then, the decline of the economy has slowed somewhat but there is massive unemployment and this, combined with pressure from Kosovan refugees crossing the border, has led people from the countryside to begin a migration to the cities, seeking work. This has resulted in the formation of squatter villages – shanty towns – which the government does not recognise, thereby avoiding the need to support the inhabitants. An unpredictable side-effect of this anarchy and migration is that the ancient traditional laws (the “Kanun”) have been brought to the cities, and the culture of forced marriages and blood feuds is a serious problem.

*A corresponding article about Ukraine and why we choose to work there can be found in the Autumn 2002 newsletter.*

## The aid you can help us to collect

We are very grateful to all of you who help in so many ways to provide physical aid for us to take to people in all sorts of situations. The recipients would dearly love to be able to thank you all personally and tell you how much your support means to them!

We now tend to supply projects which are long-term rather than the emergencies we helped with when we worked in refugee camps around Kosova. This means there has been a subtle shift in the kind of supplies which are most useful and most efficient to transport.

We are particularly keen to supply **medical equipment** and various **tools** in Albania, and **educational supplies** in Ukraine, including **computing equipment** and **stationery**. We have also supplied furniture and **building renovation materials** for schools and orphanages.

For these orphanages and some types of schools we also supply **toys**. We also take a some **toiletries** and even **cosmetics** (teenagers often remind us that they don't just want the things which are essential, they would also love to be able to enjoy the fun things other young people take for granted!)

We *do* still take **clothing**, especially warm clothes and children's clothes, and **shoes** which are in demand at the orphanages and special schools, but because storage is an issue, and we have several wonderful people who continue to be able to supply a great quantity, *we do not seek any new suppliers of clothing*. (However, we always welcome **sewing machines**.)

Finally, we have to make a plea for financial, as well as practical, support. It has always been a strength of our organisation that we find ways for *everybody* to get involved, including those people who have skills and energy to offer but can't afford financial involvement. However, each trip costs us money, as does servicing our vehicles and even printing this newsletter. And if we are to make a difference in Albania we have a great task ahead of us raising the money for the well. So, please, if you possibly can, consider making a donation. We guarantee that absolutely every penny goes directly to getting the aid to where it's needed – and nothing else.



## We're changing our name!

Most of you have known us for some time as “Brighton Lifeline Humanitarian Aid” and you may remember being told that this long-winded name was the choice of a committee! Of late, there has been no local committee, but rather, a varying group of volunteers from around the country co-ordinated by Kieran Turner. To reflect this, and not least because Kieran is moving from Brighton, we are taking the opportunity to make the name more relevant and remove the word Brighton which will increasingly be a misnomer!

The organisation itself needs a memorable name which also reflects its purpose. So we're going for simply “**Aid Convoy**” which we feel directly explains what we do, and isn't such a mouthful for people to remember.

Since we also have a website with an outdated (overly specific) name, [www.kosovaconvoy.com](http://www.kosovaconvoy.com) we are changing that too. The new website address is [www.aidconvoy.net](http://www.aidconvoy.net)

We're sorry if this change causes initial confusion, and are no great fans of “new improved” brandings just for the sake of fashion. But this change is a one-off which we feel will help people find out about us and ultimately will help our work.



*Our new website address on the side of the Land Rover, and also one of the girls from the Zamglai orphanage. The kids adore being photographed – digital cameras let them see themselves at once!*

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We are a non-profit charitable organisation composed entirely of volunteers, with no political or religious affiliation. Registered Charity status is being applied for and is pending. Donations are welcome in several ways: cheques payable to “Brighton Lifeline” (still the old name for the moment); or deposits to our account at the Royal Bank of Scotland, a/c 10105992, sort code 16-14-24. You can also give via credit card on our website.