

# Brighton Lifeline Humanitarian Aid

# NEWSLETTER

Feb / Mar 2002

Welcome to our Spring newsletter! We're now collecting for the next trip, which will be leaving on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March. Once again, the destination is the town of Chernigov, in Ukraine. On our last trip we visited the Zamglai childrens' home, about which you can read overleaf. This time, we will be returning there with a particular focus on their educational needs. We already have several computers to set up a mini-classroom for them; these were donated by various firms when they upgraded their systems. If you know of anyone working in an office environment, don't forget to let them know that even very old systems are great for teaching children the basic skills, and in any case, we are supplying places which can't even afford pens and paper - so any equipment is an very welcome!

Colleagues travelling with us from Horsham-based *Bear Essential Aid* plan to be working on the Zamglai generator and heating system during the trip. This is of course crucial because the homes are often located in villages, far from reliable power supplies or the centralised heating boilers of the urban tower block complexes. In addition, Bob Chase from Horsham will be having his second meeting with the director of schools for the region, and we expect that to lead to more opportunities to work with additional schools which have not yet received any international support.

In other news, we have had a good deal of interest from new volunteers during the winter months, when we don't take convoys due to the extreme weather. Expect our March and June convoys to be of a very healthy size! And if you would like to see some photographs, but don't have access to the internet, please do let me know, and I'll be happy to show you some of what we can't print in this necessarily low-budget newsletter! Similarly, if this is the first newsletter you have seen, please ask to find out more about our history and what we've achieved so far.

As ever, I must thank everybody who helps us, whether you regularly look out or make clothes, find sources of educational supplies, or simply tell your friends about us! Inevitably, though, each trip depletes our funds by around £700, not to mention the considerable costs of maintaining vehicles. So a particular thank-you to everybody who has come up with fundraising ideas and (sorry!) hard-earned cash! Every donation adds miles to the fuel tank, and smiles to the faces at the other end.

Kieran Turner, Co-ordinator

---

## One World Week

Thanks to our old friend Tigger Macgregor, one of our very generous long-term contributors, we were given the opportunity of appearing during the "One World Week" events at the University of Cambridge in February.

In particular, we made a presentation with a talk on "local and global" involvement by Margaret Wright, principle speaker of the Green Party. The students then hosted a benefit party for us.

If you host or know of any similar events, please consider arranging a display or talk there! Such occasions are a key way in which we make contacts with supporters, and raise awareness of our work.

## Kosova update

Following on from the happy story, in the last newsletter, of our friend who now works with the *Halo Trust*, we've also heard from Valon Veliqui, a writer from Prishtina in Kosova, who kindly hosted no less than 20 of us for a week there in 1999!

Valon has finally been able to get travel documents, and is studying in Germany's University of Passau for a year. We hope to meet up with him during one of our convoys.

One of Valon's poems, written about the conflict in Kosova, is reproduced in this newsletter. Please excuse the translation from Albanian! More of his work, and photographs from the time, are soon to be available on our website, [www.kosovaconvoy.com](http://www.kosovaconvoy.com)

## Report from our last trip

by Kieran Turner

My second trip to Ukraine began with all the trepidation of the first, never knowing what new fun and games would have been organised for us by the customs officials. These guys are serious, having been trained by the old Soviet regime, so there's none of the chaos which was so helpful in getting through to Kosova!

But I also had a feeling almost of returning home - to my "Ukrainian family." And sure enough, the incredible warmth and hospitality we received was the same as ever, being welcomed into the homes, not just of the volunteers who work at the places we support, but also by just about everybody we met. I was particularly privileged to meet a woman of 98, who still lived - with her son Sasha - in the cottage her grandfather had built! And still, this amazing little homestead, with its kitchen garden, outside toilet, and rainwater collector, was heated by the traditional Ukrainian stone oven in the middle of the house. This ingenious device incorporates a bed, at the top of the chimney-breast, and a heated flat surface below which serves as everything from guest bed to heated ironing board! (The "iron" itself being a warmed stone bar, a bit like a rolling pin!)

This time I was travelling in my own van, unlike the last trip when I travelled with the Land Rover from *Tewkesbury Independent Aid*. The sides of my vehicle, painted by children in Kosova, caused a huge amount of amusement, and I would like to think contributed to our fastest trip through customs yet - at just three hours. When we arrived at the Zamglai childrens' home, I had a swell of pride when the children all flocked to the van. I have made a promise to allow them to paint one side on the next trip! It was also rather wonderful to find not just fifteen children, but also their teacher, crammed into the van when we tried to leave!

A word or two about Zamglai. It is a home for girls only, from age 4 to around 24. They are referred to, in a matter-of-fact way, as orphans,

although in reality many of them are just abandoned. They suffer from a variety of problems which can often be attributed to the Chernobyl disaster; but it is just as likely that many of them are victims of malnutrition or "foetal alcohol syndrome." Many have obscure medical problems, and some are seriously disabled and deformed.

The home, however, is a very kind place. When the director, Nina, was asked when she took time off, she replied that, "mothers do not have time off from their children!" That is a necessary attitude. The staff have rarely been paid their tiny salaries for more than one month in three. Similarly impoverished are their facilities. We saw that the children had enough to eat, and all had cheery western clothes brought by us and other aid convoys. But there is literally no money for educational provision. These children simply do not receive an education. And since they therefore grow up with little ability to procure employment, many of them end up, aged just 24, being moved on to the only other facility the state can provide for them - an "asylum" which is effectively a retirement home. Here, again, no educational opportunities are available to them.

This is why we have determined that our next trip will focus strongly on educational assistance - paper, pencils, computers - and especially books. Picture dictionaries, and other books for learning English are particularly welcome, but since English is sought from a young age, we can then usefully supply all manner of other text books for older English speakers. As usual, toys & clothes are welcome too!

Finally, a note about travelling companions. This was a small trip, with just two vehicles. My passenger was Emma Brookes-Young, who hopes to study nursing, and found the trip a real eye-opener. With us was Bob Chase, from *Bear Essential Aid*, who was very pleased with the reliability of his new van, recently bought with donated funds. Yes everybody, this *is* a hint! Anyway, I'm glad to report that Bob's passenger, fireman Guy Pearce, will be convoying with him again, in his own vehicle, in the summer.

## "Buried Alive"

This poem was sent to us by Valon Veliqui, who was forced to hide underground for a week while the Serb police killed his neighbours above. On visiting his home, I was unable even to fit through the entrance to the hidden underground pit he had lived in. You may find this poem disturbing.

We entered the grave.  
Why should I lie, it wasn't so bad.  
Maybe it was a solution to crave for.  
It was too tight and we were two.  
I couldn't percept if anybody  
welcomed us, on the first day.  
On the second day, the death was under  
my toenails.  
Already filled with rotten bones.  
On the third day, my friend somehow  
whispered to me; about walking  
amusements that happened once.  
I long to drink something,  
said my friend on the fourth day,  
while I was "longing to piss, standing on  
foot," I replied.  
I admit that this was something  
that he was craving for too.  
"I am hungry," my friend said.  
On the fifth day, I had a feeling that he  
was browsing a cookbook.  
Constantly I was chewing bits of  
a broken tooth.  
Oh I am thirsty.  
"Only thirsty?" my friend was loathing.  
On the sixth day, with all my strength I  
was forming the last circles of spittle for  
my burnt throat.  
"Let's go out," my friend said.  
On the seventh day,  
"Let's wait until the dark.  
It's a night, too dark,  
they can't kill us."  
We were looking at the sky.  
Accidentally I learned that we were alive  
then I understood the grave's prayer.  
I covered it.  
Anyway the inscription was missing too.

Published by, and available from:  
*Brighton Lifeline Humanitarian Aid*,  
4 Atlingworth Street, Brighton,  
East Sussex, BN2 1PL, Great Britain.  
Tel / Fax: [UK+44] (0)1273 680414  
Email: [info@kosovaconvoy.com](mailto:info@kosovaconvoy.com)  
Web: <http://www.kosovaconvoy.com/>  
We are a Charitable Organisation, and  
work as part of a network of small  
humanitarian aid groups. For more  
information, to get involved, or to find  
out how to make donations, please get  
in touch. To make anonymous gifts,  
please see the website for bank details.