

Coats for Kids 2015-16

BULGARIA

We set out this morning with Hannah and Esther and a car so full of bags of coats and socks, they each had bags on their laps. Our plan was to distribute as many coats as we could, and we did, but God had even bigger plans for us. As we sit down near the close of the day to reflect on everything the Lord has allowed us to be a part of, we feel honored.

But let me back up... first things first... the purchasing of the coats and socks. A week and a half ago Larry and I went into the city and bought new socks. We got a good deal on them, so we really stocked up. It's always a shock for the cashier to see us coming with an overflowing cart of socks, but we've been doing this so long now, we knew how to have them already organized in sections to make her job easier. Then this past Monday we went back into the city to the second hand store to stock up on coats. It was pretty slim pickins, but we did our best. Unfortunately we only filled one of the vehicles. Two more empty vehicles were with us, so we took off in search of another location. It was much better than the first place and a new contact was made there. We filled the remaining vehicles and headed back to our house where Hannah had brownies and refreshments waiting. Here are two pictures—one of the cart of socks and one of our entryway so full of bags of coats, we could hardly get up the stairs. At last count there were well over 40 bags in the entry and halls.



We then organized coats and socks each afternoon for the past week, as our schedule permitted, and felt we were ready to begin distribution in nearby villages.

First stop this morning: Novi Pazar. Pastor Ismael was already gathering the local children and organizing them in lines. We carried the bags inside and Esther and I organized them to make distribution easier, while Hannah got set up to take pictures and Larry controlled the crowd. Working together, we were able to give out around 50 coats in under an hour. In between influxes of children, we were able to encourage Sister Naziye, who is having a hard time with her blood sugar. Here are a few pictures from that distribution:



The girl standing next to Larry above is Sinem, Pastor Ismael's granddaughter. Every time I see her, I am reminded of God's hand in her young life. When she was four, she was diagnosed with a tumor in her lung and required surgery, which cost a lot of money and the family simply did not have it to pay. We asked you all to pray and one friend forwarded the email on to other friends and shortly a man we had never met wrote and told us he wanted to help. He paid for her surgery and the trip to the capital for the family to be with her. The surgery was a success and today she is in good health. We praise the Lord for His faithful lovingkindness.

On to Kaspichan... Kaspichan is generally a lively distribution... it's one of our rougher, tougher villages. But today the family who hosts the church in their house asked us to gather around and pray for the lady of the house, Sidika. She has been very sick for several weeks and today when we arrived, she was in bed. Her husband, children, grandchildren, and church folks all gathered around the bedside with us and prayed for her. Many of the local children are traveling abroad Europe with their families, who are finding better job prospects elsewhere, so we gave out coats to those remaining in the immediate area. Fifteen coats were given out quickly so the family could resume care of Sidika.

Because we had some daylight left, we decided to climb the mountain to Nikola Kozlevo to see about Sister Radka, a widow I have written much about of late. She has no income at the moment, so we stopped to pick up a bag of food to take with us. She was so glad to see us. She really needed someone to talk to and tell everything that has happened in her life since her husband of 47 years passed away. Between abscessed teeth requiring emergency dental surgery, doctor visits for sciatica, bill collectors, and caring for a young hyperactive boy orphaned by his mother and abandoned by his father... that would have been enough stress for one person. But carrying it all alone, along with the intense grief... she has asked us to have everyone pray night and day for her. We prayed with her, but during the prayer she jumped up and ran outside. When she returned, she whispered to me that we all needed chicken soup with fresh chicken in it, and that she left us a gift outside in a bag to take home with us. I thanked her and asked if she would like a coat for Stanislav, the boy that has been in her care for over a year. As we walked out to the car to find the right coat for him, she handed me my take home bag. Now, friends, this was a first for me and I admit I was rather shocked, and I hope shock did not conspicuously register on my face... she gave me a live chicken in a bag. Like a Walmart bag, but thinner. And green. A chicken. Alive. In a bag. I took a picture of it because it amused me. Wanna see it? Sure you do!

Page turn...



We ended up giving the chicken to Pastor Ismael for Naziye. I had just been telling her she needed more meat and less starch in her diet because of her diabetes, and here comes some fresh meat. It was too much to be a coincidence. We were also able to minister to a widow, who seemed just as blessed to minister to us with her chickens. And we got to pray with Sister Sidika and encourage her. Plus, we got to give out coats. The day was wonderful!

And now I will close because this letter is already three pages long. Please continue to pray as we strive to get more coats organized and sent out to the villages.

Stay tuned...

Carrie M. Leach

Bulgaria

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Part 2

11-15-15



Today we went to the village of Stoyan Mihailovski, where we were able to distribute around forty coats and socks. It was precious, really. Kids came running and had a difficult time standing still at the door, awaiting their turn. It was a rather quick distribution because of their excitement, which was contagious. They made me smile—especially the little guy you see on the left. Pastor Ismael got caught up in the excitement as well, as

he grabbed this little guy up into his arms before the boy's mother had fully gotten the coat on.

The pictures are blurred because of the way the sun was

shining through the window, but I don't want you to miss seeing these precious people, so please excuse the quality of the photos.

This next picture features a young mother with three small children. With the yearly coats and socks ministry, we have been able to help her every year. The youngest boy was born prematurely and had to be kept warm all the time. It was a blessing to be able to help take care of him. And it has been a blessing to continue to help this family.



This last picture might be my favorite... as we drove slowly through the village (honestly, you HAVE to drive slowly through the villages... potholes, ruts, etc. impede normal driving speeds), we saw some of the kids going home with their new coats. They were happy and thankful.



I should close for now. There will be no more coats updates for a few weeks, as we have English camp meeting coming up, followed by Thanksgiving. But in the meantime we will be doing more preparation work for future distributions. Continue to pray for us.

Carrie M. Leach
Bulgaria

Coats for Kids

2015-16

Part Three



This weekend, my burden to meet certain children of Romania finally came to pass. Before I begin writing about this visit, I feel compelled to tell you that though I will certainly try my best, there are no words that can accurately describe this experience. Whatever you read in this update, magnify it exponentially in your imagination and you may get a small glimpse.

Missionary Dave Turner and national Pastor Ali took us out to the church yesterday afternoon. The sun was shining and the weather was pretty good for the fifth of December. We drove through the center of town... a city with beautiful views of the Black Sea. Resorts lined both sides of the street. High rises. Hotels. Tourist attractions. You name it, this city had it. A very lovely town. Turning left off the main street, the houses were still nice, though not ritzy. Continuing on, everything about the city looked like a quaint little place. Soon the neighborhood ended and fields began. And just as soon, the fields turned into littered spaces, quickly turning into a major dump. Literally. We entered the city dump. Two giant pits were dug into the ground so people could throw their trash into the pits. Instead, they just threw it anywhere and everywhere. Construction rubble, commercial trash, and household trash filled the expanse, though a nice view of the Sea was on the horizon. Driving further through the dump, a little civilization emerged into view... a little neighborhood of converted shipping containers set on top of trash. This is where the local government housed these people after they bulldozed their shanties a couple years ago. I knew about the container village. Knew it was located outside the city and near the dump. But knowing this did not prepare me at all for what I actually saw. I covered my mouth to stifle a cry before I even got out of the car.



This is one of several containers. Each has a door, a window, and an electrical outlet. I would estimate the space inside to be about 15 sq.m. The lady who lives here feeds the local children. She has a couple children and also houses another lady and her children. There is no running water in her container. A few doors down, in between a couple other containers, are two outhouses. No showers. There is a pipe with faucet sticking up out of the ground behind the containers, and that is the sole source of water. They wash their laundry by hand at the faucet, even in the winter. They keep the faucet running so it doesn't freeze. I inquired as to the nearest store for them to buy bread and it was about a mile away. In fact, the nearest house was nearly that far away, unless you count the shacks popping up a few minutes walk away.

And yet, these were some of the happiest, most loving children I've ever met. Some shook my hand and asked my name. Others showed off their gymnastic skills. A couple boys began a wrestling match to show us how strong they were. And some showed us their toys. One girl had a half a Barbie she was quite proud of. A couple kids found an old buggy with three crooked wheels and broken top and they were taking turns pushing each other around in it. Only two or three had jackets. Most were completely barefoot. All the kids were soon gathered into the container pictured above and we sang hymns with them. The boy below on the right watched me intently the whole time. Brother Dave told the kids about the coats and they were excited. He went on to tell them about just how much Jesus loves them. They soaked it all in.



After we prayed with them, we headed back to the car to get the bags of coats and socks. I intended to just watch this distribution, but Brother Dave offered for me to fit the coats to the kids and I jumped at the chance. A mother handed me her baby outside. Maybe she saw me cooing at him. Or, maybe she wanted him to be the first to get a coat. Or, maybe she just needed a break. Either way, I ended up with a baby in my arms, trying to figure out how I was going to hold him and use one hand to fit the rest of the kids. Fortunately for me, he began to fuss, so his mother took him back. He is pictured above on the left. The boy in the middle was pretty cool. He must be very ticklish because if you even get close and pretend like you're going to tickle him, he breaks out into a very contagious fit of giggles. The boy on the right stood there unnoticed, and undaunted, for quite some time after receiving his coat. When I finally noticed him still standing there, it dawned on me that he wanted his picture taken. As soon as Brother Dave snapped his picture, he skipped away.



These two really blessed my heart. The one on the left was the first girl called in. She ran to me and wrapped her arms around my legs and buried her face into my tummy. I hugged her for a while and then pulled back to get her coat. When I squatted down to zip up her new coat, she plopped onto my lap. I held her for a while and then asked to have my picture taken with her. The girl on the right whispered her name to me. Annamaria. She's seven. Her coat fit great, but when she sat on my lap to get her picture taken, I saw her feet. These were not the tender feet you would expect on a seven year old child. These were dry, hardened feet from a very difficult young life. I reached into her coat pocket to retrieve the socks... but there were none. I had some extra socks I brought for the adults of the church, and though I knew they would be big, she needed something on her feet. I'm glad they were too big because I was able to pull them up over the hem of her too short pants, completely covering her legs from the wind. She loved the polka dots. Larry later told me she ran right out to show her friends her polka dots.



We must have been taking too long or we were especially boring because the baby conked out. And this happy boy with the beautiful smile also wanted to show us his scary face.

I will try to close this very long update with a few more pictures... it's just that these children have touched my heart so deeply, I just want you all to meet them too.



These children are precious and I am immensely honored to have spent the afternoon with them. Larry and I talked about them and the distribution well into the night because we were so deeply affected. Before we left their neighborhood, they hugged and kissed us. One boy, so excited about his coat, gave Larry a huge bear

hug. In the very first picture at the top, many of the forty kids remained to pose with us for a picture. One little girl wanted her arms around both of us, so you can see her little face sandwiched between us. I snatched up giggly boy so he could be seen above the crowd. This picture is so precious to me, I'd like to have it printed so I can put it in my Bible. Jesus wasn't ashamed of me... when I was yet in my sins, He died for me... and He's not ashamed of these precious little ones living in the city dump either. It is our prayer that the seeds sewn in their young hearts will grow and they will be saved. Pray for the Pastor and missionaries who hold services here every week and pray for the salvation of the children.

But, friends, though yesterday's work was wonderful and blessed, I don't believe our winter work is done for these kids. Last night before I went to sleep, I thought of them. They need shoes. I prayed. This morning when I awoke, my first thoughts were of the kids and their need for shoes. I prayed. All through church, my heart was heavy for the shoes and I prayed. At lunch, during some discussion about this church and their conditions, I broke down crying about the shoes. We all talked about how to get it done and hopefully our plan will work. Please pray with us that we find a good supplier for the shoes/boots. And pray for Pastor Ali and Brother Dave Turner as they try to measure each child's feet so they can go purchase the footwear. And also pray for us as we continue the coat work here in Bulgaria. There is still much to be done.

Thank you all for your continued

prayers. Carrie Leach
Bulgaria

Coats for Kids

2015-16

Part 4

This update is especially special and I can hardly write or even browse the pictures for the tears of joy in my eyes. The children we wrote about in the third update were in desperate need of shoes. Coat and socks distributions are much easier than buying and distributing shoes. You can wear a pair of socks that are a bit big, but shoes are another story. Because of the difficulty, as well as cost, we rarely give out shoes (unless a bulk shipment of shoes is sent from America). But, these kids were in such desperate need, it broke our hearts. Larry and Brother Dave Turner, fellow missionary in Romania, came up with a plan, which put it all on Brother Dave's shoulders. Though his schedule is already overly full with his ministry work there, he was glad to take care of this. He went back out to the container village and the shacks and measured each child's feet. Then he went on a hunt for durable, affordable shoes—in bulk. After he found them, he and Pastor Erhan went back and gave them to the kids. Thirty-four children received warm, waterproof shoes, and they all fit. Unlike other shoe distributions, this one went smoothly and Brother Dave rejoiced when sharing with us this news. He spoke of the joy of all the children. One girl dove at him with the biggest hug after trying on her new shoes. We are thankful we were able to be a part in helping these precious little ones. And now, I will share an overload of pictures...





Please continue to pray for these children, and all the others we strive to reach with the love of Christ. Thank you all for your prayers and support for our family, our missionary group, and the many ministries here in Bulgaria and Romania.

Carrie Leach
Bulgaria