

BUNĂ ROMÂNIA ProjectsAbroad

The Official Newsletter of Projects Abroad Romania

May 2011, Issue 38



WHAT'S INSIDE

2	SUPERVISOR'S NOTE by Alexandra Ichim	8	Dirty Weekend at Prejmer Daycare Centre
3	ROMANIA INSIDE AND OUT Romania, a Country of Contradictions by Michiel Bellon	9	1st of June - Child's Day by Alexandra Ichim Belle and the Beast by Ariana Urmstom
4, 5	PROJECTS UPDATES Voices of the World	11	VOLUNTEERS' MOMENTS VOLUNTEERS' STORIES
6	COOKERY CORNER Doughnuts Romanian Style	12	Romania For The First Time by Isabelle de Cure-Ryan
7	RECENT EVENTS Participation at the 'Living Library' by A. Ichim	14	Animal Project in Romania by Emily Paginton
		16	USEFUL INFORMATION



Hello everyone and welcome to the 38th edition of the Projects Abroad Romania Newsletter. Hope you are enjoying summer time all over the world; except Australia where it's winter now. We come to you now with the happenings of the past month and what Romania has to offer in terms of information, articles, news, updates, projects and, last but not least, culture.

We begin by presenting one article written by our current journalism volunteer, Michiel Bellon from Belgium. Thank you to Michiel for writing this nice article on his first impressions on Brasov and Romania. The image he created is one of 'contradictions'. Please enjoy reading it as it presents some interesting views and opinions.

To continue, we chose to present to you several summaries written by all journalism volunteers, being introduced by their supervisor, Alexandra (me). They all wrote presentations of what happened during all workshops with the Voices of the World Group of Journalism volunteers and Romanian students. Please read it carefully and see what they have been working on in the past month.

Moving to serious stuff, we'll give you some details on the most recent events that Projects Abroad volunteers, together with the Staff Members, organised for several collaborators. Among all these, I would like to mention the Dirty weekends that we organised in two different Day Care Centres to help them renovate the buildings in which the children live. A second event was part of the community projects and it was called the Living Library where our volunteers were part of the living books. Last but not least, was the celebration of Child's Day at Prejmer Day Care Centre, which was also their 5th Anniversary of existence and collaborating with different organisations in Brasov.

Furthermore, the cookery corner this time is about something delicious that everyone wants to taste at least once when coming to Romania – doughnuts made in our style!

The last section is the volunteers' stories. This time you can read some first impressions of Romania – the first glimpse of Isabelle, one of our journalism volunteers and also an interesting story of the Animal Care Project told by Emily Paddington, a former Veterinary Medicine Volunteer.

I really hope I gave you a bit of the insight into this newsletter. In order to find out more, please read the whole issue and enjoy it at the same time because it's created with loads of good thoughts and love for you all! Cheers and till next time... La revedere!

By Alexandra Ichim – Drama, Dance, Journalism Supervisor; Social Manager

Romania, a Country of Contradictions

By Michiel Bellon, current Journalism Volunteer, Belgium

Travelling to far away places is always a leap into the big unknown. Having recently graduated from a Philosophy course and not knowing exactly what to do next, I rather abruptly decided to spend some time abroad. Because of my long lasting fascination with communist history and a preference for little trodden paths, the choice for Romania was an easy one. Still, I didn't quite know what to expect.



My first impressions of this strange Eastern European country were 'mixed', to say the least. Romania seems to be a country littered with contradiction. On the one hand the country has been heavily industrialized under communism, on the other hand one sees signs of a rural and ancient tradition which is still very much alive everywhere.

While driving to Braşov I saw flocks of sheep graze idyllically in fields full of garbage. And on the road fancy BMW's crossed old looking horse carts all the time. Modernity and middle ages meet in the middle of the street. The same sense of paradox remained when I arrived in Braşov. The grey concrete of the recent communist blocks contrasted starkly with the elegant atmosphere of the old town centre and the screaming capitalist billboards that stared at me from every corner differed greatly from the serene mountain ranges which surround the town.

All of these paradoxes combined make for an interesting mix of old and new. But they bring with them some problems too. The sudden and rapid changes that overtook Romania the last few decades seem to have left the country without a firm and fixed identity. The difficulties this evolution has caused are obvious. A country which has lost sight of its own past is a poor country indeed. And who has no awareness of the tradition that formed him, is bound to experience alienation in some form or another. Therefore, preservation of ancient but fading practices, rituals and beliefs in the modern age is crucial because once they are gone, they are gone forever.

To quote Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein: 'Tradition is not something a man can learn; not a thread he can pick up when he feels like it; any more than a man can choose his own ancestors. Someone lacking in tradition who would like to have one is like a man unhappily in love.' Tradition, like love, matters. For that reason, I hope the work I do in the months I am here will be of some use to the Romanian community.

Voices of the World Romania

The following texts talk about the workshops within the Voices of the World Project that we have every Friday afternoon together with our Journalism Volunteers and Romanian students. The following statements reflect summaries that our Journalism volunteers wrote on their Journalism Workshops. They are written by Tash Potter, Li Min Teng and Michiel Bellon. We hope you enjoy reading them and keep yourselves updated with what has been happening during April and May with the group of Journalists.

Friday, 8th of April

Interesting Fact: Reading a newspaper has a lower impact on global warming than reading the news online for 30 seconds.

The request of orchestrating a workshop for a group of Romanian students in journalism was initially quite a daunting task. Often thinking back on what you have learnt over your student days provides so much that only a blank canvas lies forth within your mind. Knowing little about Romanian media, I decided to focus on worldly news as their workshop topic.

To begin the students and I had an informal discussion on news and how it has changed from the past to become the technologically drenched topic it exists as today. We discussed why newspapers are dwindling in popularity and how social media is taking over, in forms of the ever popular Facebook and Twitter. We debated the notion as to whether this was a modern and progressive move in our society, or a dangerous one; allowing free opinion and bias to flow into everyday truth in news events. As an exercise the students formed groups and were given large pieces of paper to create their own newspaper, creating an attracting name for the newspaper and two headlines for their news cover accompanied by pictures. To create their papers they had to follow some headline guidelines to target an audience, appeal to their attention and capture their focus. Both groups were very creative and their final products were assessed highly among their group members.

Friday, 22nd of April

The meeting started with an interview; Tash Potter interviewed Projects Abroad's Drama, Dance and Journalism Supervisor Alexandra Ichim on the dancing career to which she dedicates her life. By observing, the participants could learn how a proper interview is conducted.

They had the opportunity to ask questions of their own as well. During the second half of the meeting I gave an improvised workshop on the importance of being critical and the use of argumentation in journalism. This was quite a thrilling experience for me, because for the first time I discovered how the skills I had mastered throughout my Philosophy studies could be put to use in a practical way. First, we discussed the difference between visual and written media with regard to critical thought. We argued that written media is more suitable for a critical approach than visual media.

Written journalism gives both the author and the audience the opportunity to think the arguments through and to evaluate them at an own chosen speed, whereas the fast pace of visual journalism doesn't. Next, I explained how a good argumentative article is to be written. I highlighted, among other things, the importance of attention grabbers at the beginning of the article, the significance of a clear and well thought out structure and the difference between valid and invalid forms of argumentation. Finally, I gave some general tips on improving the critical writing process. Although time was lacking to do a practical exercise, all the participants agreed that the meeting had been an instructive experience.

Friday, 30th of May

In the workshop held this week the Projects Abroad volunteers and the students spent the afternoon focusing on editing and proof reading their final articles. Editing is essential in journalism, and is a process which must be repeated multiple times to ensure the final document is perfect. Significantly, for Criss and I editing was a longer task and required more attention. Bianca and Li had written their article together and therefore needed less time to fine tune their article on the orphanage.

The article written by Criss and I focused on dancing in Romania. Because it was structured in two parts, following the interview of a salsa dancer and a ballroom dancer, it needed to be organised into different parts that still flowed together. After the final edit of grammar and punctuation, we organised the two parts under different subheadings, yet with a common title. This ensured that the pieces could be understood as articles under the same topic yet with different opinions and experiences. Finally it was important to edit again to change the American automatic spelling function of Microsoft Word into British English. All these steps were crucial for the final article and its projection to the reader.

Friday, 8th of May

For this week's Journalism Workshop, we discussed the different angles we could come up to write about Osama Bin Laden's death. Mircea had assigned us this topic, which is huge recent news that shocked the world. Being a good journalist, it is important to be well informed and on top of big news circulating the world. Osama's death had been hitting headlines everywhere after he was shot in Pakistan. After our discussion, we divided ourselves into groups. Michiel and Criss decided to touch base on the political side.

They discussed their topics and were on Michiel's laptop doing research on what they were going to write about. Tash, Bianca, Denisa and I adjourned to the 2 computers to do research on Osama's history and read up on recent news about his death. As journalists, it is important to possess researching skills; a good article should be written truthfully that covers all sides to a story. Tash and Bianca refreshed themselves on the September 11 attacks and current news on his death. Denisa and I did some research on Osama's history and Al-Qaeda.

After a good solid half an hour of research, we gathered together to brainstorm for interview questions that were to be conducted next week. We concurred to interview the younger demographic on their views and knowledge about anything related to Osama and consequences of his death. We took time conferring different types of questions, generic to specific, that would be informative for our article.

Friday, 20th of May

This week's workshop was a sequence from last week's where we researched, came up with interview questions and discussed angles to write about Osama Bin Laden's death. The structure of today's workshop was to divide ourselves into 2 groups and head out to interview people on Osama Bin Laden's death. Criss and I headed to a nearby park where teenagers usually hang around, whilst Tash, Bianca and Denisa went across the street. We decided to split into groups to cover more ground in terms of interviewing, as well as expanding our dynamics.

Since Tash and I couldn't speak Romanian, we were the secretaries of this expedition while the girls played the role of interviewer and translator.

The girls found it a little difficult translating from Romanian to English as they felt as if the true meaning of their subject's answers were either diluted or lost in translation. However, they tried their best to include every single detail possible into their translation. In the midst of our interviews, we decided to not only interview the young people, but also beseech the views of the older generation. In doing that, we had more information and contrasting views that could consolidate our article in a more wholly manner. After an hour conducting interviews, we met up to compare notes.'

Doughnuts Romanian-style

Ingredients:

- sweet bread dough
- 0,5 l oil
- sugar with vanilla flavour

Directions:

1. Sprinkle flour on the work surface and then roll a one finger thick sheet of sweet bread dough.
2. Cut rounds of dough with the doughnut cutter and place them on a cloth.
3. Cover and let them double their bulk.
4. Heat oil in a pot and fry the doughnuts, turning them on all sides.
5. Keep the heat low.
6. When they are ready, remove with the slotted spoon and sprinkle with vanilla flavoured confectioner's sugar.
7. You can make doughnuts filled with marmalade or preserves.
8. In this case, place the filling in the middle of one doughnut, cover with another one and stick the edges together.

Then fry.

Anyway, Romanian doughnuts are round with no hole and delicious!



Projects Abroad volunteers participated in the 'Living Library'

By Alexandra Ichim – Social Manager; Drama, Dance and Journalism Supervisor

Hello everyone,

I just wanted to keep you updated with the events that happened in Romania during the latter couple of weeks. One of these events was the Living Library in which three of our volunteers participated. Muneeza Mirza from Australia, Ariana Urmston from the United States of America, and Michiel Bellon from Belgium were the three volunteers who participated in the Living Library. This is a new project that one of our collaborators, Scut Association, has been organising during the past year. The project has the purpose to get people's attention on the acceptance of diversity among nations and cultures. It wishes to emphasize the acceptance of diversity because, most of the time the differences among people are not taken as being resources, but they lead to creating stereotypes and prejudices among cultures and nationalities. Due to these differences, people tend to create discriminatory statements, to be suspicious when it comes to certain nations or even to exclude some of the people from their circles of friends.

This edition of the Living Library focused mainly on presenting different nationalities and their qualities, descriptions and typical features as a whole. The specific point in this project is that the books that we can borrow are alive. Our volunteers participated in this project, being their own nationalities, meaning Australian, American and Belgian. The local community went to the Local Library and borrowed 'these books' for 30 minutes, while they were allowed to ask any questions regarding their nationalities, culture, typical traditions and many personal details that could offer them a better perspective on what their nationalities are like.

Our volunteers Muneeza, Ariana and Michiel were some of the most read books in the living library and they had a great time talking about themselves as the nationalities I mentioned above. The project gave them a different perspective on what people from other cultures can think of their country or people. Furthermore, they were able to explain their real feelings and features, showing stereotypes to be fake or mistaken. They were able to explain exactly the way teenagers in America, Australia, Belgium think, study, work, socialise and do all the other daily



activities. It was a unique experience for them and also for the people who 'read' them. They also got the chance to befriend the Romanians and continue their discussions even after the Living Library ended.

Projects Abroad volunteers were always interested in participating in this project and this time they really achieved more than just 'helping the community', they succeeded in making their nations known in their real sense. We want to thank them again for participating in this project and we can't wait for others to be involved in the near future.

Dirty Weekend at Prejmer Day Centre

By Isabelle de Cure-Ryan



It was a bright morning in Prejmer on Monday (May 30th) when a group of volunteers from Projects Abroad – myself and six others – arrived at the local day centre, enthusiastic to begin our seemingly simple task of repainting three classrooms under Claudia’s watchful eye. Despite our lack of experience, over the course of the day we all received what can only be described as a ‘crash-course in painting’. Here are just a few of the valuable lessons we learned:

- Preparation is crucial. From laying down sheets of newspaper to carefully applying masking tape, extreme precautions must be taken to protect the room from the wrath of dripping paintbrushes. That is, unless you want to find yourself on your knees scrubbing the floor with Ajax several hours later. We found this out the hard way.
- Paint rollers and brushes must be squeezed out very thoroughly, to avoid creating random streaks on the wall. Thankfully, in our case, the paint dried perfectly even, although there were one or two moments of panic.
- The shortest volunteer should not be the one selected to paint the ceiling.
- Don’t forget to open windows. Otherwise, everyone starts to feel a little dizzy, and some may even begin to do strange things like sticking bits of tape to their legs for no apparent reason, or forming clubs named after their combined initials.
- Painting is a workout. Our biceps were all noticeably bigger by the end of the day.
- Singing along to the Backstreet Boys makes everything a lot more fun.

Due to the length of our lunch (over which we debated the strength of cheeses and compared our various claims to fame) and the frequency with which we paused to take photos or dramatically collapse on the floor, our task wasn’t complete until the late afternoon. We headed home – covered from head to toe in paint – satisfied that the classrooms looked as good as new.

1st of June - Child's Day

By Alexandra Ichim - Social Manager; Drama, Dance and Journalism Supervisor



Yesterday, June 1st, Romania celebrated Child's Day; Projects Abroad Staff members Daniela and I (Alexandra), together with our volunteers Isabelle, Camilla, Li Min and Jack, took part at one of the festivities that our collaborators organised.

The event took place at the day centre in Prejmer, where Projects Abroad, Dani and I, all received certificates that thanked us for our collaboration and help we offered to the centre.

After the discourses held by the Director of the centre and the guests, we had the chance to see some talented children perform dances and drama shows for us.

Among these performances our volunteers were impressed by the group who presented traditional dances and also by the Salsa Kids trained by me and my dancing partner.

Besides the beautiful shows that our volunteers were able to see and appreciate, we all went outside in the park, near the village's fortress and played games with the children.

The Projects Abroad volunteers were in charge of the Face Painting of the children - for free. All the kids were so thrilled and happy for the gifts they received and all the nice treats, smiles and applause everyone around offered them.

In the end, we all left the park singing 'Children's World' - a typical Romanian song dedicated to children. It was a beautiful day when all of us were children one more time...



Belle and the Beast – Drama Mini-Project

By Ariana Urmston – Current drama volunteer, USA

I came to Projects Abroad at the beginning of May to teach drama classes in English to Romanian students. Immediately I was asked by Alexandra if I could work on a mini project, in which myself and a few other volunteers would perform a play for a couple of foster homes. I immediately agreed to the idea as I love performing more than anything.

Talking with a couple of the other volunteers we decided on a version of Beauty and the Beast. After reading the original story as well as taking aspects from the Disney version I came up

with a script. I imagined the lights, the sounds of thunder, the Beast coming in terrifying even the actors. Okay so maybe my expectations were too high, but this was a slight example of the over dramatic part of my mind. I love theatre, especially musicals and therefore big productions come naturally to me. However, we were to be performing for kids all under thirteen who probably wouldn't notice the difference between a Beast fully dressed in fur or someone holding a paper plate mask in front of their face. In fact, they might even enjoy the second one more. Although I wrote the script using lights, sound cues and many references to a big set, I had to let go of that vision and create a piece these kids were going to enjoy.

We only had a few rehearsals in order to prepare for our performance, but everyone involved wanted this to work out. In the end we had a show, it may not have been the show we started out with, but it was definitely an interesting show. We were all a little nervous about how the performance would turn out.

We arrived at the first orphanage and set up. Immediately the kids loved the Beast and the mask he wore. Alex, who was translating our lines into Romania, was able to ask questions to the kids about our play to get them involved.



I was shocked by how little we had to do to make them happy. Some of the children loved it so much they walked to the next foster home to watch it again. We decided to modify for the second time so that it was still exciting for the first group.

Afterwards the kids wanted to play with everyone and all the props. It was nice to see how something simple could give someone a smile. I'm sure everyone involved was very happy with the result and would be very eager to do it again.





Romania for the First Time

By Isabelle de Cure – Ryan



My first glimpse of Romania was from the sky. It was, as the captain described it, “a beautiful day right across Europe,” and the mid-afternoon sun was flooding the cabin, reminding me that I had journeyed to a part of the world where May marked a calm transition from Spring to Summer. After more than a day of flying – and being seated between two large men who lacked both spatial awareness and taste in films – I was glad to find myself in an empty row, next to the window, for the short flight between London and Bucharest.

The view, quite simply, was perfect. I’ve always thought that every country looked the same from up in the air, but in this sense Romania proved itself to be truly unique. Unlike the overwhelmingly repetitive tapestry of farms, fields and forests surrounding Heathrow airport, the Romanian landscape was a patchwork of purples, greens and yellows so bright and geometrical that it appeared almost artificial. Silvery lakes and rivers glittered in the sunlight and small clouds drifted beneath us – every element of the scene was as beautiful as it was picturesque.

Perhaps because I had been told so many times about the paradox of 21st Century Romania, I found myself searching the landscape for dramatic contrasts before we had even landed. Aside from the strange sight of snow-covered mountains on such a pleasant spring day, it wasn’t until I had been picked up at the airport and found myself hurtling down a highway that I began to witness the infamous contrasts between old and new, rural and urban, traditional and modern.

Much that I saw through blurry, tired eyes was reassuringly familiar. Every aspect of modernity and every trace of the Western world reminded me of the home I had left behind, from billboards to petrol stations to faded red Coca-Cola signs.





There were, however, some strikingly foreign sights. Signs in Romanian directed seatbelt-less drivers to unfamiliar places as they sped down the (wrong side of the) road. Dogs, chickens and cows wandered casually close to the cars, sometimes accompanied by locals wheeling carts, selling flowers, or just sitting.

The scene began to change as we left Bucharest – factories and tall buildings became Orthodox churches and crumbling wood-and-stone houses, scattered in clumps, with laundry hanging out of windows like flags. One by one, the colours I had seen from the sky began to make sense; the yellow fields were in fact endless rows of bright flowers that were just as beautiful from up close. Images continued to shift throughout the journey, and I felt like I was receiving a very dramatic overview of the diversity and eclecticism of modern Romania.

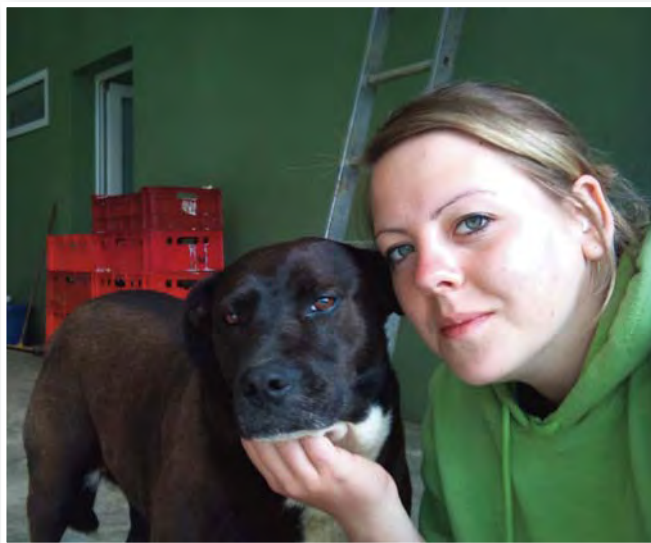
I have lost count of how many times I have been told, “Romania is a wonderful/great/beautiful country. Shame it’s full of Romanians,” since arriving here (accredited, to my amusement, to a different source each time). I am, however, inclined to disagree. I’m yet to meet a Romanian who has failed to be as friendly, cheerful and hospitable as they can be. Last weekend, I was waiting for a train when a woman approached me, pointed to my foot, which was blistered from a day of walking, and held out a handful of Band-Aids.

Food, drinks, laughter, hugs and smiles have been offered in abundance since I arrived. My first impression of Romania was of a beautiful country from the sky, but I’ve come to realize that the impression made by Romanian friends and strangers alike will surely outlast all others.



Animal Project in Romania

By Emily Paginton



Romania: Volunteer Animal Care Work-Experience Placements

The Animal Care Project in Romania is based primarily at the world's largest Bear Sanctuary close to the Carpathian Mountains, on the outskirts of Brasov. This voluntary Animal Care Placement is suitable for people who are passionate about the protection of animals and for those who enjoy the outdoors.

Volunteers on the Animal Care Project will also spend some time working at a local zoo and a rescue dog shelter. These placements are all suitable for gap year students, university students and those taking a career break.

This Animal Care Project is aimed at volunteers who are ready for an adventure and will get stuck in with what ever tasks are needed! A weekly timetable is always put in place so you are aware of what your role will be for the following week. Volunteers will experience the contrasts between working in a natural sanctuary and in a zoo environment.

Romania is home to Europe's largest population of brown bears. In Romania, many bears are sadly still kept to entertain tourists. The bears often receive a poor diet and not enough water; they are kept in cramped cages and in poor conditions, with little protection from the bitter cold in the Romanian winter. In 2006 the Bear Sanctuary near Brasov was established, providing a purpose built home for rescued bears.

The sanctuary accommodates almost 30 bears in over 70 hectares of forest. The sanctuary is increasing in size each year, as more bears are rescued and the number of bears is expected to increase to about 50 within the next year.

Volunteering on an Animal Care Placement in Romania with Projects Abroad

Volunteers will usually divide their time between the Bear Sanctuary, local zoo and a dog shelter. It is also possible to spend extra time at the Bear Sanctuary at the weekends. At the zoo volunteers work with bears as well as other wild animals. At the dog shelter volunteers help with all aspects of the dogs' care.

At the Bear Sanctuary volunteers help to prepare and provide food for the bears, and feed them. Vaccinations and disinfestations also occasionally take place, which you can observe. You can also help with activities such as the maintenance of fences in the forest, digging foundations for new facilities, and generally helping with the conservation of the forest by planting trees and shrubs.

When the bears are first rescued they are transported to the sanctuary where they have an initial medical check at a health centre. Once they are sufficiently recovered, they are gradually introduced to forested enclosures where they quickly revert back to instinctive behavior. Before arriving at the sanctuary these bears knew little of life outside a cage, whereas at the sanctuary they have pools to splash and swim in, food for foraging and places where they can make dens.

Although the Romanian law protects bears from abusive and poor conditions, as there was previously no place for authorities to house rescued bears, this law could not be enforced. The primary aim of the sanctuary is therefore to help eradicate the cruel exploitation of bears in Romania, by empowering the Government to enforce the law. The sanctuary also aims to develop a rehabilitation and release programme for cubs brought to the sanctuary, enabling them to return to the wild.

All volunteers stay with a local host family in Brasov and will get local transport to work each day. This project is only available from March to November, due to the bears hibernating in the winter months.

