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269 S. Beverly Drive, Suite 435
Beverly Hills, California 90212
Tel: 310.275.2217
Fax: 310.275.2253
info@blueheronfoundation.org
www.blueheronfoundation.org

Blue Heron Spreads its Wings: The Blue Heron Scholarship Program

What happens when Romanian orphans grow up? When they reach age eighteen, the state wishes orphans good luck and sends them to make their way in the world. There is little thought about higher education, and nearly no resources for it. That is why the **Blue Heron Foundation has launched a college scholarship program, and in 2005, has already awarded 26 four-year scholarships, totaling more than \$80,000, to Romanian students who began life as orphaned and abandoned.**

"Based on latest reports and research, the biggest problem institutionalized children in Romania face today is lack of life skills," says Stefania Magidson, President of the Blue Heron Foundation. "The opportunity to attend college allows them to become economically self-sufficient as well as socially productive members of a society that needs to take advantage of all of its intelligence and creativity."

These scholarships were awarded to seventeen young women and nine young men from six of Romania's most economically disadvantaged counties. In Moldavia, seven scholarships went to students from Suceava; eleven to students from Iași; and one to a Bacau student. In Transylvania we

awarded three scholarships to Brasov students, three to Sibiu and one to Prahova.

It is hard for those of us in the U.S. to imagine the enormous obstacles these students face. More than half had been abandoned; some at birth, some as children under age ten. More than a third outlived both parents; in one case, even the adoptive parents were deceased. For most others, one parent was deceased and the surviving parent was unable to care for them, due to mental illness, alcoholism, or drug addiction. Often entire families of siblings have grown up in a state institution.

That any of these children have survived with aspirations to pursue college is a miracle. That is why we cannot let them down. With the Blue Heron Scholarship program, we wish them a future as productive citizens and leaders of tomorrow who will bring wisdom and compassion because of their own experience. **The Blue Heron Foundation is committed to improving the quality of life of abandoned Romanian children and providing them with greater access to life's opportunities.**

Thank you for your continued support.

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Short Answers to Big Questions

Most of us will never forget the suffering faces of warehoused Romanian orphans that made international headlines in 1990. "Isn't that crisis over?" we are sometimes asked. Sadly, it is not. Here are some answers to the questions we are most often asked:

Is there still a problem with orphaned infants and children in Romania?

Yes. Around 9,000 infants and children were abandoned just last year. In 2006, Romania institutionalizes 31,000 children, according to the *New York Times*, which speculates that "the real figure may be higher." Indeed, at least as many children are now placed in foster care. According to UNICEF, the total number exceeds 81,000.

Aren't these children being adopted now?

Since 2002 there has been a moratorium on international adoptions, allowing only about two thousand adoptions per year to take place by Romanians only. But thousands are still institutionalized. To protect children and reflect improved care, the government has passed a law forbidding foreign adoptions. And due to economic hardship, many Romanian families are unable to adopt.

Have there been improvements in Romania's care of orphans?

Policies have been implemented to abolish the warehouse-style institutions where neglect and abuse ran rampant. Now, public or private residential institutions are much smaller, and whenever possible, they are placed with families or in family-environments (foster care.) UNICEF and other international and local organizations are working with the government on these reforms.

What are the problems now?

While there has been great progress, the economy is still trying to recover from the handicaps left by decades of communism. This means that corruption, drug addiction (mainly alcoholism), mental illness and most of all **poverty** are still problems the government is incapable of addressing properly. These become factors in mothers, many of them young and poor, abandoning thousands of newborns each year. It also results in many other children being abandoned later in life, when parents, due either to crime, mental illness, alcoholism or unemployment can no longer care for their children.

Do the reforms protect all children with disabilities?

Disabled children continue to remain at the bottom of the list in Romania. The new law 272 that bans placement of babies in institutions does not protect children with "severe disabilities." Babies with and even some without severe disabilities were detained in institutions, according to a new report. A nurse in an orphanage in Timisoara reported that there are too many for the staff to take care of there. Because they do not receive enough attention, "They become disabled from being here."

What happened to those orphans from 1990?

They have grown, but not always healed. When they reach eighteen, they are released – often to the streets. The greatest challenge facing these young adults is a lack of life skills; even basic socialization. Because social support, employment and higher education is so hard for these young adults to find, they are likely to remain in poverty. Many of them, unemployed and sexually active, have babies and bring them back to placement centers where they themselves grew up, thus giving birth to a second generation of abandoned children. Blue Heron's scholarship program aims to break the cycle of despair and dependence.

How long will the need last?

We don't know, but we do know that UNICEF will end its current level of support in 2009 – just two years away. As the victims of Romania's most painful era in recent history continue to grow, their needs will change. We want them to know they won't be forgotten.

Sources:

"Romania's Orphanages, Continued," (editorial) *New York Times*, May 14, 2006.

ROMANIA – Country profile, The Official Summary of the State of the World's Children 2005.

<http://www.unicef.org/romania/overview.html>

Laurie Ahern, Eric Rosenthal, et al., JD, "Hidden Suffering: Romania's Segregation and Abuse of Infants and Children with Disabilities," Mental Disability Rights International (Washington, D.C. 2006).

<http://www.mdri.org/projects/romania/Hidden%20Suffering-exec-sum.pdf>

A Message from the President

Dear Blue Heron members, contributors and volunteers,

Because of your support over the past four years, hundreds of orphaned and abandoned Romanian children have received the stuff of life: food, clothes, and human touch. As the government has begun to address the needs of these individuals over the years, we have tried to position our efforts strategically, so that we fill niches not yet properly addressed by social programs. Our support has focused on awarding college scholarships to orphaned students who need financial and emotional help while attending college.

The past year has marked the beginning of our Blue Heron Scholarship program. We have strived to conceptualize a program that is more than charity; it is a real investment in the future of orphaned and abandoned Romanian children and indirectly in a country striving to uplift itself and its people.

Words cannot express my deep gratitude for your ongoing support, be it financial or in-kind. Only your generous support has allowed us to make sure babies are fed, cuddled, and even simply held. Now, we are able to help their crucial preparation for adulthood by supporting their college education.

You keep making the impossible come true.

Thank you.
Stefania Magidson,
President



FRIENDS OF BLUE HERON FOUNDATION

The goal of the Blue Heron Foundation is to maximize the size of our annual grant by keeping our expenses as low as possible. This aim has been realized through the effort of many dedicated Blue Heron members, plus the generosity of the friends listed below:

Kenny Cohen
Helen Haft
Kendra Kuppin
Cristian Balacescu
Ioan Calaic
Silvian Centiu
Angela Cialenco
Mike Costache
Ileana Costea
Virginia & Robert Joffe

Michele Lagueux
Neil Leifer and Randye Stein
Shirley Magidson
Anca Marza
Corina Micevsky
Anastasia Soare
Gorelick & Uslaner, CPAs
Merchants Bank of California

Special Thanks

To our vice president **Mike Costache**, who is available and working towards our goals every day of the week, regardless of the hour. Among his great accomplishments for the foundation this year:

- Overseen the Mentorship program and secured 20 out of our 26 mentors.
- Organized the Valentine Day Ball in Romania in conjunction with Michele Lagueux from Special Olympics – Romania.
- Updated our website.
- Obtained a 60% cost reduction for ECDL courses
- Created a liaison with the Fulbright Scholarship Committee-Romania with the intent of awarding a yearly scholarship to one qualifying Blue Heron Scholar.

Thanks to our treasurer, **Angela Cialeno** for overseeing the smooth flow of all the details of the Blue Heron Scholarship program including the Mentorship program.

Thanks to the generosity of **Keny Cohen, Helen Haft** and **Kendra Kuppin** for donating new and gently used clothes for the orphans.

To **Kendra Kuppin**: Started the Romanian Orphan Club at Buckley School, Los Angeles.

To **ECDL- Romania** for offering a 60% discount to our BH Scholars who are taking a 7-day course in computer literacy that includes learning programs such as Excel.

To **Anastasia Soare, Virginia & Robert Joffe**, and to **Neil Leifer** for hosting Blue Heron Salons in 2005 and 2006.

And to our tireless volunteers in Romania: **Prof. Ioan Calaic**, **Prof. Adrian Balacescu**



Nicolae

4th year student, Major: History
Lucian Blaga University, Sibiu
Abandoned in state institution since birth

2006 Blue Heron Collection



Paula-Diana

1st year student, Major: Engineering (leather
and textile)
Engineering University, Sibiu
Abandoned in state institution since age 15



Gabriela

1st year student, major: Economics
Economics Institute, Iasi
Both Parents deceased



Ana Maria

1st year student, major: Geography and Tourism
Stefan the Great University, Suceava
Both parents deceased



Adriana

1st year student, Major: Economics and Public
Administration
Stefan the Great University, Suceava
Both parents deceased



Ana Maria

1st year student, Major: Engineering
Technical University, Iasi
Abandoned in state institution since age 9



Marius

1st year student
Gheorghe Asachi University, Iasi
In state institution since age 14



Florin

2nd year student, Major: Education
Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Iasi
Abandoned since 2 months of age



Aida

1st year student, Major: Engineering
Technical University, Iasi
Mother deceased, Abandoned in state institution since
age 11, along with 2 other siblings



Elena

2nd year student, Major: Chemistry
UAIC University, Iasi
In state institution since age 7



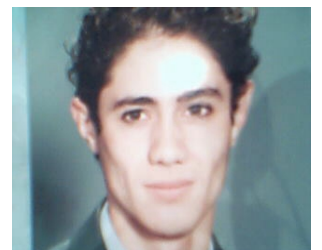
Ionut

2nd year student, Major: Engineering
Technical University, Iasi
Abandoned in state institution since age 9, along
with siblings



Maria

2nd year student, Major: Engineering
Technical University, Iasi
Abandoned in state institution since age 9, along
with siblings



Laurentiu

2nd year student, Major: Engineering
Polytechnic University, Bucharest
Abandoned in state institution since age 14

College Scholarship Program



Elena

Ist year student, Major: Engineering (leather and textiles)
Engineering University, Sibiu
Abandoned by parents since age 2, along with siblings



Adrian

Ist year student, Major: Economics and Public Administration
Stefan the Great University, Suceava
Both parents deceased



Mirela

Ist year student, Major: English and Italian
Alexander Ioan Cuza University, Iasi
Abandoned at birth
Adoptive parents deceased



Daniela

Ist year student, Major: Sociology
Alexander Ioan Cuza University, Iasi
Both parents deceased



Cristina

Ist year student, Major: Sociology
Universitatea de Vest, Timisoara
Both parents deceased



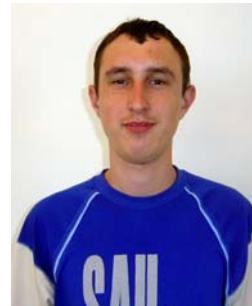
Elena

3rd year student
"Ecologica Green" Foundation, Iasi
In state institution since age 14



Cristian

2nd year student, Major: Automotive Engineering
Technical University, Iasi



Dumitru

Ist year student, Major: Engineering
Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Iasi
In state institution since age 8, along with two other siblings



Radu

Ist year student, Major: Engineering
Technical University, Iasi
In state institution since age 11



Nicoleta

Ist year student, Major: Public Administration
Valahia University, Ploiesti
Abandoned in state institution since age 11



Vasile

Ist year student, Major: Engineering (leather and textiles).
Engineering University, Sibiu
Abandoned in State Institution since age 9, along with 6 additional siblings



Geanina

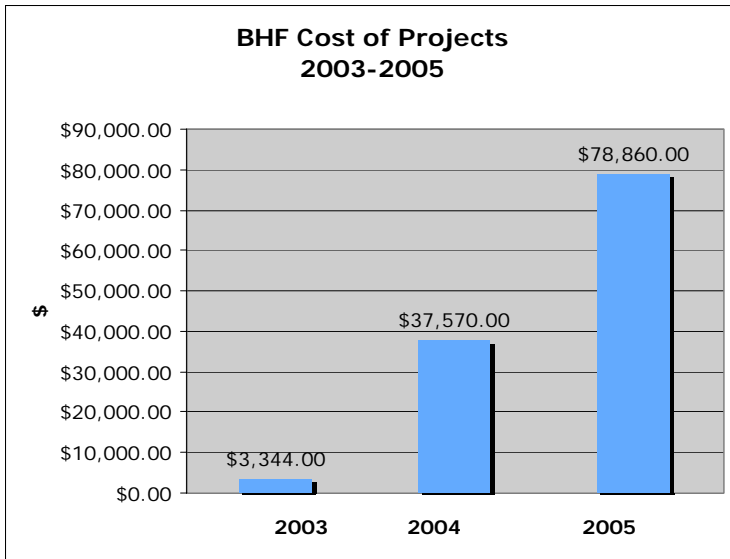
Ist year student, Major: English and French
University of Foreign Languages, Sibiu
Abandoned in state institution since age 15, along with 2 other siblings



Lucian

2nd year student, Major: Management
A.S.E. University - George Barițiu, Brasov
Abandoned in State Institution since age 14, along with siblings

What We've Done: *Monitoring Blue Heron's 2003-2004 Projects*



BHF Project Costs

Blue Heron's projects are designed to meet the needs of the least powerful and support them in the most efficient way, a way that produces long term, positive and profound changes. We carefully monitor our expenses by signing detailed contracts with state orphanages and sending money in very small increments, as previous criteria is met and proof of accomplished goals is shown. Besides several volunteers who oversee and are directly involved with the programs in Romania, the foundation's two officers make yearly trips to Romania, and have direct and regular contact with the children we help and the staff.



2004, The Rupea Playground Project Before Blue Heron's involvement the Rupea Placement Center had only a muddy field for dozens of children to play on. Our first major project was to design and underwrite a state-of-the-art playground and sports court there. Five contractors bid on the project, and the winning company completed the play facility for \$32,000. Since then, 80 orphans ages 4 to 18 have a place to play, run and laugh in the open air.



2003, The Loving Arms Program Some Romanian orphans were so neglected they stopped crying – because they got no response, not even being held. According to recent research, babies who are not held develop serious learning disabilities. To address this need, we started the “Loving Arms” program by hiring eight full-time qualified caregivers to hold and cuddle babies at the *Micul Print* orphanage in Brasov, where 200 children under 3 years of age had only one adult for every 10 children. BHF covered the monthly salary of the caregiver (\$160) and in the second year we were left with four full-time caregivers. This program cost \$18,360.

We ended the program last year because, as part of its reform program, Romania has generated enough funds to establish small family homes with no more than 12 infants per home and with three caretakers per shift. We are proud we did the right thing at the right time. Now it is time to direct our resources where they are better used.

A Busy Year: Our 2005-2006 Activities

Blue Heron succeeds by finding people who are as passionate as we are about caring for orphans and using charity dollars efficiently. Part of our outreach is to host "salons" where people meet others involved in the Foundation, and have the opportunity to learn what Blue Heron does and how we work.

If you would like to host a salon, please contact us. We'll give you step-by-step instructions for a perfect event. If you know someone who would like to attend a salon, let us know and we'll make sure you are informed of upcoming opportunities.

- April, 2005 - NY Salon hosted by Neil Leifer
- April, 2005 - NY Salon hosted by Robert and Virginia Joffe
- June, 2005 - LA Salon hosted by Anastasia Soare
- June/July, 2005 - Stefania Magidson, Mike Costache and Silvian Centiu traveled to Romania to interview about 70 potential candidates as Blue Heron scholars.
- May, 2006 - Stefania Magidson went to Romania to meet with all 26 Blue Heron scholars and encourage the completion of a successful school year.
- February, 2006 - A Valentine's Day ball, a fundraiser by the Blue Heron Foundation and Special Olympics-Romania was held at the Schutzu Palace in Bucharest.
- November, 2005 - sent more than 300 lbs of new clothing
- January, 2006 - NY Salon hosted by Robert and Virginia Joffe
- January, 2006 - International documentary *Baraka* screening hosted by the Romanian Cultural Institute in New York
- March, 2006 - BH President Stefania Magidson spoke to the Women's Resource Center and the Non-profit and Grants graduate class at her alma mater, the University of Utah.
- May, 2006 - Annual members' meeting at the home of Shirley Magidson, Beverly Hills.

The Circle Goes Round

Two years ago, Blue Heron was inspired by the fundraising model set up by the Everychild Foundation. This Los Angeles based organization raises funds for children by creating a group of enthusiastic donors who commit a set and equal amount every year instead of organizing events. This way, administrative and financial resources are not sacrificed to organizing large events, and the expenses are kept to a minimum, going **directly** to the cause.

We quickly realized that cultivating personal relationships with people willing to give at least \$500 per year was the most effective way to carry out our mission. Blue Heron's circle of committed members who donate annually at this threshold has proven to be a great success. Two years after our founding in 2002, we have found a stable and efficient form of fundraising that will secure our work on behalf of Romanian orphans. We have a total of 57 members (some of them giving more than \$500/annually) and our goal is to reach a membership of 200 by 2010.

This year, we were delighted to find that we had inspired a giving circle for another worthy cause: breast cancer. breastcancer.org is the world's most visited online site for those in need of information at a difficult and often desperate time. Blue Heron's founders have encouraged this new fundraising model for breastcancer.org and worked closely with them in setting up this model of giving within their organization. We were proud to host the first event of the **Southern California breastcancer.org Giving Circle** whose aim is to attract 100 members giving at a level of \$2500 annually. We wish them much success in reaching their goal!

Other Ways You Can Help:

Nu Collection When purchasing a rug from the Nu Collection, (7924 West 3rd Street, <http://nucollection.com/>), a mention of Blue Heron will bring a 15% donation to our foundation.

Cornelia Day Resort in New York City, (63 5th Ave Ste. 8, www.cornelia.com) for offering BHF 15% donation of the total spent on goods and services when clients mention the Blue Heron Foundation.

Alexandra Nechita, the richly talented prodigy painter, donates a work of art annually to BHF. Stay tuned for our announcement about this!

To learn how to take advantage of these generous opportunities, please contact us at 310-275-2217 or info@blueheronfoundation.org for information.

Upcoming Events:

We are proud to announce eight pending scholarships through our partnership with **Lift the Children** in a program targeted to help older orphans stay in school. Lift the Children is a Romanian-based foundation that is able to ensure regular personal and financial monitoring. Blue Heron is providing a grant to pay for food, rent, and tuition for eight promising students who might otherwise not be able to stay in college. We will visit these students next Spring and report back on their progress.

April, 2007: Blue Heron officers will travel to Romania to meet with all Blue Heron scholars, Child Protective Services administrators and UNICEF representatives.

May, 2007: annual meeting presenting past year's accomplishments, future goals, possible projects and an invitation to pledge yearly donations for 2007. Location and exact date to be announced.

The Blue Heron Foundation is committed to improving the quality of life of abandoned Romanian children and providing them with greater access to life's opportunities

Our goal is to have a total of 200 members who commit \$500 annually. Blue Heron's founders pay 100% of the expenses, thus every single dollar donated goes directly to the children in need. We have 57 members so far and hope to reach our goal of 200 members and \$100,000 yearly donations by 2010.

HOW CAN I HELP?

- Become a member by contributing \$500 annually: please fill out the included envelope.
- Become a contributor: donations of any size are welcome. Please fill out the included envelope .
- Support with services: Your talents with website and graphic design, printing or any other suggestions of services that would help our organization and fulfill your desire to contribute are greatly appreciated.
- Organize a salon by inviting potential new members. Please contact us at 310.275.2217 and we will explain how to set it up.

Visit www.blueheronfoundation.org

Email to info@blueheronfoundation.org

Please contact us at 310.275.2217



Blue Heron Foundation

269 S. Beverly Drive, Suite 435
Beverly Hills, California 90212