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Blue Heron Works Together with Formidable Romanian NGO:

The 2007-2008 Every Child Matters Program

"It is in the shelter of each other that the people live." In 2008 we took this Irish proverb to heart as we joined forces with Hospice Casa Sperantei, one of Romania's most respected and longstanding NGO's, to advance the "Every Child Matters" program.

In medicine there is a belief that in order to cure a disease, you must treat the entire person. We took a similar approach to our work in the Romanian hospice/palliative care system, developing our project along a three-pronged, holistic plan of action: first, by providing resources; second, by enhancing health through direct medical care and education; and third, by working closely with the Romanian government to legislate standards of care. Our goals for this project were steep, and we are proud to report our success in fulfilling them.

The Fundamentals: Providing Resources

We were able to contribute **\$100,000** in addition to Hospice Casa Sperantei's donation of **\$137,000**. Our utmost concern was to ease the suffering of chronically ill children, as well as their caregivers and families, by providing medical, psychological, spiritual, and practical assistance. With our combined total of \$237,000, we treated a total of 189 children suffering from HIV and other chronic illnesses, living both in and out of state-run orphanages. We were able to introduce a home-care referral program at the Hospital of Infectious Diseases in Brasov, and to train this hospital's staff in palliative care. The president of Hospice Casa Sperantei confirms our success: "There is no doubt at all that children's palliative care in the County of Brasov has been greatly enhanced as a result of the 'Every Child Matters' project."¹

Education: Empowering people to help themselves

One crucial component of our program is to arm people with the knowledge and confidence to take control of their own health. This takes the form of training for hospital staff and caregivers, and preventative health education for schoolchildren and other vulnerable groups. At the outset, all new staff involved in the project went through a comprehensive training program in the care of HIV patients and paediatric palliative care, followed by workshops for the staff of over nine orphanages throughout the county, as well as a nationwide conference for paediatric palliative healthcare workers. Additionally, 1900 schoolchildren in Brasov and Zarnesti received HIV health education. According to the World Health Organization, health education has been one of the most important factors in fighting the spread of HIV/AIDS in Europe.²

Legislation: Advocacy for those who are unable to speak out

In March 2008 the Romanian Ministry of Health worked with Hospice Casa Sperantei

¹ Graham Parolls, "Final Report For 'Every Child Matters,'" August 2007 – September 2008.

² World Health Organization, Regional Office of Europe. Online: <http://www.euro.who.int/document/ens/en56.pdf>

Blue Heron Works Together with Formidable Romanian NGO Continued...

to develop a national plan for palliative care. Guidelines for the plan were established in May of that year, at a national conference in Bucharest that involved 90 doctors, nurses, social workers, and psychologists from both children's hospices and state institutions. The final guide was presented to the Ministry in June 2008. It has already been published on the web and it will soon appear in book form.

This year's results of the "Every Child Matters" project are astonishing and inspiring: 286 children have received specialist care during the 12 months of the project, over 250 medical staff members throughout the area have benefited from training courses or workshops during the project, and 1900 children have been educated on HIV prevention. Most significantly, a model of care has been established that can be replicated in other parts of the country. Moreover, the Romanian government is now much better informed about the needs of chronically ill children and continues to support the allocation of more resources for children's palliative care.

Blue Heron Scholarship Program: Ferrying Young Scholars from a Troubled Past to a Dynamic Future

The Blue Heron Scholarship Program is entering its fourth year of providing financial and emotional support for Romanian college students who were orphaned or abandoned as children. Our success stories are plentiful, and we commend our Blue Heron Scholars for their utter bravery in committing to higher education in spite of life's challenges. Here is an overview of the scholarship program:

- Students receive a \$65 living stipend per month to cover any personal expenses.
- Students accepted to universities without government-subsidized tuition receive up to \$600 in tuition money per year.
- Students attending government-subsidized institutions receive up to \$400 per year for supplementary coursework. This can include accredited foreign language courses (Cambridge or TOEFL), computer and information technology courses (to receive the certification of "European Computer Driving License") or driving courses.
- Scholarships are instated by contract for the duration of a school year. Students are able to renew their contract every year until graduation.
- By signing the contract, Blue Heron Scholars make a commitment to attend class regularly, to make good grades, and to pass year-end qualifying exams.
- Blue Heron Foundation provides its scholarship recipients with adult mentors who follow their progress and provide the crucial emotional support that these young men and women lack as they enter university.
- Blue Heron Scholars report their progress to Blue Heron Foundation and their mentors on a monthly basis. They are encouraged to submit their reports in English, to practice their composition skills. Students are also encouraged to share their triumphs, struggles and thoughts in these reports, forging a meaningful relationship with the foundation and their mentors.

A Message from the President

Dear Blue Heron members, supporters and volunteers,

I am so proud of all we have accomplished this year. I assure you none of it would have been possible without your help.

This past year, in partnership with The Hospice of Hope Romania, we brought the “Every Child Matters” program to a successful completion. As a result, we provided direct medical services to 150 terminally ill children. We trained 230 medical professionals working with the terminally ill and educated over 2,000 school aged children about HIV awareness and prevention. Additionally, we are working closely with the Romanian Ministry of Health to establish a Minimum Standard of Care Guide that would apply to all the medical and social institutions in Romania that specialize in treating terminally ill individuals. It is an honor for us to stand at the forefront of these changes.

We continue to provide our 35 Blue Heron Scholarship recipients with financial support for school tuition and emotional guidance through our Mentorship Program. Without the help of The Blue Heron Foundation, these promising young students, all of whom were orphaned or abandoned as children, would have had no chance of attending and graduating college. We consider the scholarship program much more than charity – it is an investment in the potential of these gifted young men and women, providing them with the opportunity to live independent and productive adult lives.

As you know, every dollar donated by you goes directly to our cause: to provide immediate help and significant change to the lives of the children we are committed to help. It is with deep gratitude that I thank you for your ongoing support during this challenging economic climate.

Sincerely,

Stefania Magidson

President



Thank You To Our Mentors:

Carmen Andrei	Cristian Lison
Mihaela Blanariu	Bianca Marinescu
Diana Cergan	Raoul Marinescu
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Simona Lederman	

Special Thanks

The goal of our 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:

Mike Costache

**Cristian Balacescu
Ioan Calaică**

**Naomi Caffee
Mihaela Constantinescu
Monica Diaconescu
Olivian Pitis
Mitch Ratulea
Katy Rouillon**

**Anastasia Beverly Hills
Consulate General of Romania, Los Angeles
Powerstorm
Greenberg Glusker
Blue Sparrow Medical
Gorelick & Uslaner, certified
Public Accountants
Merchants Bank of California
Romanian American Professional Network**

Success Stories: Graduates of the Blue Heron Scholarship Program

At Blue Heron Foundation, we try to speak for those vulnerable members of Romanian society who are unable to speak for themselves. But as these orphaned and abandoned children gain the support they need in life, their voices begin to ring loud and clear. We have much to learn from their stories of overcoming obstacles and finding a place for themselves in the world despite their many challenges.



Nicolae Truta

Nicolae Truta, Brasov

In 1980, when he was only one year old, Nicolae's mother brought him to Child Protective Services. The conditions were dire in those days: there were many shortages, including food and heat; and civil rights were all but nonexistent. After the fall of communism in 1989, life in the orphanage started to very slowly improve. At the age of 19, Nicolae was forced out of the Child Protective System because of his age, even though he had not yet finished high school. He started to sleep at friends' houses as he worked hard to find a job. The deck was stacked against him: he lacked education, experience, and guidance, parental or otherwise. On top of all this, his Roma (Gypsy) ethnicity was another strike against him.

He eventually found work in an auto parts store, where he earned well below minimum wage and was paid "under the table." Nicolae attended high school from 1998-2002, a time he describes as the most trying. He had to confront very challenging living conditions: during the day he worked odd jobs in order to buy food and during the night he would sleep in a dilapidated apartment building for "single people" that was gradually losing all of its utilities: gas, electricity, and finally water. He was forced to shower and wash his clothes at various friends' apartments whenever he could, in order to show up for school clean and avoid being mocked by his classmates.

During his high school's exam week, Nicolae was painting apartments by night and taking exams by day. After graduation, Nicolae was accepted at Sibiu University, where he studied in the department of social work. In 2002 he was admitted to the Lucian Biaga University in Sibiu where he studied history.

We met Nicolae during his final year of college, and we could see right away that he was a very ambitious, hard-working young man who was struggling to keep his life together in the midst of two minimum wage jobs, school exams, and living conditions well below the poverty line. We wanted to ensure that Nicolae graduated and found a decent place to work, where he could use his diploma and make a comfortable living.

We were extremely fortunate to have Mr. Calaican, an old Blue Heron supporter, step in as Nicolae's mentor. Mr. Calaican took to Nicolae like a son, guiding him through the remaining challenges and encouraging him to finish the school year with good grades. As a former officer at the School Inspectorate, he also started making phone calls on Nicolae's behalf, asking his old colleagues about any openings within their school district for a history teacher position. Nicolae used the last two months' stipend from Blue Heron to buy himself a suit, and with Mr. Calaican's help he updated his CV and began setting up appointments for job interviews.

At that time, Blue Heron founder Stefania Magidson was paying her annual visit to Blue Heron Scholarship recipients in Romania. While chatting with Nicolae during the reunion dinner, she noticed he was barely eating—he only took a bit of mashed potatoes and drank Coca-Cola. She learned that, due to many years of malnourishment and lack of access to dental care, Nicolae had only two teeth left in his mouth. It was heartbreaking to see a young man who had overcome so much, yet was unable to eat and afraid to smile. She wondered, "How will he be taken seriously at job interviews, or as a history teacher in front of the class?"

During a visit to Jessica's Nail Salon in West Hollywood in the summer of 2006, Stefania Magidson shared Nicolae's story with five Romanian manicurists. Within an hour, the manicurists raised the \$500 needed for Nicolae's "new smile."

In the fall of 2006 Nicolae wrote to us with an update of his progress. With the help of Professor Balacescu, another Blue Heron volunteer in Brasov, he was able to find a good dentist and get a special rate for his dental work. Mr. Balacescu stayed in touch with the dentist and followed up on the process over several months. For the first time in his life, Nicolae felt "looked after" and treated properly for a medical condition he had silently suffered with most of his life.

Meanwhile Nicolae was competing with several candidates for a single job opening. With the encouragement of his mentor, Mr. Calaican, Nicolae was hired. We are happy to report that he presently teaches history and museum studies at Scoala Generala Sambata de Sus in Victoria, Brasov region.

He wrote to thank us in the winter of 2007: "I have no words to express my gratitude to the Blue Heron Foundation for all of their help. Thanks to you, I now have the chance to follow my chosen path in life, and I know I will not disappoint you. I will spread the word about the opportunities you have provided me, as I continued to finish my studies and find my place in the world. As for my mentor, Mr. Calaican, I have no words to describe the depths of the heartfelt relationship we have built. This remarkable man has guided my steps in an uncertain world and took time out of his own busy life to listen to me, to be there for me, and to offer me priceless ideas and advice."



Cristina Porsega

Cristina Porsega, Suceava

We first met Cristina in the spring of 2005 when we interviewed her as a potential Blue Heron scholarship recipient. Cristina lost her mother at a very young age, and her father died in poverty when she was an adolescent; as a result of these hardships, Cristina was so traumatized that she could barely communicate during our interview. But she has made immense progress in the years that we've known her, and now she shares her story with resounding strength:

"We need that knowing that will fortify our mind and strengthen our soul and ultimately make us better people." –Ellen White

"I focused on math and science in high school, intending to stay in the field through college. However, in the end I realized that my true calling was to work with children, so I finished my studies in Social Work.

Right after passing the licensing exam, I had the great opportunity and pleasure of being employed at a preschool with an extended schedule. Even though the first few weeks were quite challenging, now, three months later, I've become so close to the children that on weekends I miss them terribly.

It is extraordinary to think that in my profession I will have a direct impact on the present and the future of so many children, who will soon become adults themselves. Strong character is much more valuable than material possessions, which are only temporary. Therefore, helping to mold the character and morals of young people is the noblest task I could possibly take on.

Blue Heron Foundation's requirement to do volunteer work with disadvantaged children led me to choose a career in this rewarding field. Blue Heron's support in paying for additional courses in English and Information Technology further strengthened my skills and enabled me to find a job. From the bottom of my heart: THANK YOU!"

What we've done: Monitoring Past Blue Heron's Projects

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 DGASPC, the National Child Protective Services 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 president makes yearly trips to Romania, and has direct and regular contact with the children we help and the staff.

2003: The Loving Arms Program

Dan, a Romanian orphan adopted in the US said in a recent profile that his birthday, in March, was never celebrated during his first years in a Romanian institution. In his new home, he had birthday parties – cake and presents. "I thought they didn't have March in Romania," he said, still bewildered over why his first few birthdays were ignored.



Blue Heron caregivers playing with toddlers at the Micul Print orphanage, Brasov, 2003.

According to recent research, babies like Dan who are not held develop attachment disorder as well as 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 in 2005 because, as part of its reform program, Romania has generated enough funds to establish small family homes 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. We are very happy that other groups are continuing this work, such as the Atlas Family Foundation, which funds what it so wisely calls "high-impact early childhood intervention and education programs."

2004: The Rupea Playground Project



Children playing at the Rupea Playground on inauguration day, Rupea, 2004

A muddy field—that was all that dozens of children housed at the Rupea Placement Center in the Brasov region had to play on before Blue Heron became involved with the Child Protective Services (DGASPC) of Brasov. 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, almost 100 abandoned children ages 4 to 18 have a place to play, run and laugh in the open air.



Five year olds at the Rupea Placement Center sharing a moment of joy during the inauguration of the Rupea Playground, 2004.

Frequent Questions

In light of the astonishing changes taking place in Eastern Europe since the fall of the communism, it is easy to forget those left behind in the wake of progress—namely, helpless abandoned and orphaned children. Even as Romania sets out on a new path in the European Union, it is still very visibly beset with need. It is the fundamental goal of our foundation to improve the quality of life for these forgotten children, and enable them to meet the challenges of life in post-communist Europe.

People often ask us to describe the changing situation in Romania. Here are some of the most common concerns and questions:

Romania became a member of the European Union in 2007; does this mean its economic and social problems are over?

Unfortunately, there is still a desperate need for improvement in several areas of humanitarian concern. Though Romania has made substantial economic progress since the year 2000, the country continues to suffer from chronic corruption, endemic poverty, and a lack of infrastructure, which leads to a low standard of life for many of its citizens.¹ Romania's infant mortality rate remains the highest in the region, which puts it in the company of North Korea, Lebanon, and Uzbekistan rather than its fellow EU members.² Likewise, Romania's figures for life expectancy, net income, and employment are all significantly lower than most other European countries. This sobering picture points to the urgent need for continued support of the most vulnerable groups in Romanian society.

What new hardships have arisen as part of Romania's entry into the EU?

New politics, old problems: since joining the EU, Romania has witnessed the rise of "international" problems such as human trafficking, drug trade, illegal arms trade, and the spread of HIV/AIDS, all of which compact the older problems lingering from the fall of communism. Romanians rank among the "most trafficked" people in Southeastern Europe, as they are sold into prostitution or forced labor in western EU countries. Alarming, a large percentage of them are children. This has a debilitating effect on already unstable family and community structures, resulting in even more abandoned and orphaned children.³

Are the notorious warehouse orphanages of the 1990's a thing of the past?

Sadly, many Romanian orphans and abandoned children grow up in similarly dire conditions. According to UNICEF, in today's Romania "more than 80,000 children live in institutions or substitute families, deprived of parental care. The understaffed education system is in need of resources and modernization."⁴ As institutionalized children grow into adults, they often repeat the cycle of poverty, drug addiction, and mental illness, often giving birth to unwanted and abandoned children who wind up institutionalized themselves. Now they face further economic hardship due to worldwide recession. But thanks to the efforts of Blue Heron Foundation and other organizations, these conditions are gradually changing. We still depend on your help!

What kind of challenges face Romania's institutionalized children as they grow up and enter the world?

Now that Romania is part of the post-communist "New Europe," its institutionalized children enter the working world grossly unprepared for the new challenges it offers. Technology, sales, and corporate management jobs are on the rise in Eastern Europe, and with many industries going global, English fluency is becoming a career requirement.⁵ It is essential that Romanian youth receive an education to equip them with the necessary skills to succeed in the European workforce. With these changes, there are now more opportunities than ever for bright young Romanians, and Blue Heron Foundation is committed to providing these young men and women with the skills to seize them. Your donation is instrumental in our efforts to make this a reality.

What remains to be done to improve the quality of life of Romania's orphaned and abandoned children?

An entire generation of brutally institutionalized children is now coming of age and entering mainstream society, and they are doing so in a period of rapid change in their country's history. Providing these young people with support is the goal of our Blue Heron Scholarship program. The government budget lacks sufficient funds to care for institutionalized children with HIV/AIDS, so measures must be taken to continue improving medical care. Furthering these measures is the goal of our "Every Child Matters" program.

How long will the need last?

Though we have made great strides in improving the quality of life of vulnerable children, our battle is far from over. Blue Heron Foundation continues to stand at the forefront of humanitarian improvement in Romania, and a tremendous amount of work remains to be done in the foreseeable future.

¹ CIA World Factbook, Romania. Online: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ro.html#Econ>

² CIA World Factbook, Ranks of Infant Mortality Rate. Online: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2091rank.html>

³ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, quoted online: http://www.groundreport.com/Arts_and_Culture/Romanian-women-most-trafficked-in-Southeast-Europe; see also Miko, F. T., *Trafficking in Persons: The U.S. and International Response* (Congressional Research Service, 2007).

⁴ UNICEF, "Issues Facing Children in Romania." Online: http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/romania_background.html

⁵ CIO Magazine of Technology and Business Leadership. Online: <http://www.cio.co.uk/concern/resources/news/index.cfm?articleid=919>

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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.

How Can I help?

- Become a member by contributing \$500 or more annually: please fill out the included envelope.
- Become a contributor; donations of any size are welcome. Please fill out the included envelope.
- Become a mentor to our Blue Heron Scholarship recipients: by reading monthly reports from an as signed student and responding to them, giving support and guidance.
- Support with services: your talents with website and graphic design, writing, printing, non-profit consulting or any other suggestions of services or product donations that would help our organization further its mission, are greatly appreciated.
- Host a salon by inviting potential new members. Please contact us at 310.275.2217 for further details.

Although annual membership contributions are not due until April 2009, we welcome your donation before the holidays.

Donations made before the end of this year are tax-deductible for 2008!