

Dear sponsors,

we are happy to send you the first newsletter of the year about the work in Marghita! A big thank you for everything you have done and continue to do, and a warm welcome to those of you who are new supporters! A small report about our Christmas activities is available on our website: www.fce.ro

Cerasela's story

FCE has four family homes with children aged between 6 -18 yrs. Cerasela lives in Casa cu Flori, is 11 years old and is in fifth grade (year 6). When she heard about the newsletter that is sent out to people who have made it possible for her to have a family and a home, she is happy to share about her life without any questions needed.



*Cerasela in the family home
Photo - Anna Hållam*

"I was only two years old when I came to Casa Albă so I don't remember anything before that. I only wanted to be with my older sister, Olimpia, at Casa Albă and I cried when I wasn't with her. I remember one birthday when I had a 'pig' birthday cake because I loved pigs so much! I had a soft toy pig that I loved!

When we came to Casa cu Flori, I remember thinking that the rooms were very nice. I think I was five years old then and I remember that Demelza came with some foreign visitors who gave us skipping ropes and we had so much fun!

I like eating couscous, schnitzel and potato soup but not strong salami. We bring sandwiches to school and if the salami is too spicy, I take it out! I would like to put on weight but I don't gain very much. It makes me happy when I weigh myself and see that I have gained some weight.

We used to have a big rocking horse out in the yard and I used to ride it and comb its mane. At camp in Chişlaz this summer, we had the opportunity to ride real ponies. I remember thinking that everything was so big at the camp when we were there the first time because I was so young then. It's good being the youngest because your older sisters take care of you. Sometimes I want to be big like them but I don't want the hard classes they have in school.

I like school but not maths. The breaks are the most fun thing! Every afternoon I receive help with my homework. When I was younger, I was behind the others in my class in maths and it took me a whole summer holiday to learn multiplication.

At the Club I love the worship songs! I received a bar of chocolate as a prize for learning the whole of Psalm 1 off by heart and then I shared it with a boy who couldn't learn the psalm. I defend him in school when the other children



tease us who come from FCE. We play together and play games on the computers at the Club. In school I like writing stories on the computer. I dream about moving to America to be a film director or a hairdresser if I can, or an artist because I like drawing too.

In church I'm in the children's choir and it was really fun this Christmas when we went carol singing for the elderly people!

I want to tell you that we have had an extension built on our house. Costi has worked hard and it looks very nice! First there were Swedish men who started the building work. I saw that one of them had a sore back, but he worked anyway. The Swedish ladies made us curtains and tablecloths and now it looks so pretty!

Ionița has seen many changes

It can be a difficult change to stop working and enter retirement. Martin Ioan (Ionița) is 66 years old and has now emptied his office. Ionița says he has had a fantastic work place and wonderful colleagues for almost twenty years. He has seen and been a part of many big changes over the years.



Ionița has many memories from his time at FCE

The first mission was the renovation of the boarding house in Cadea. Teenagers who had grown up in the orphanages were living there in terrible conditions. "I, as a Romanian, didn't know about the suffering that existed in such institutions," Ionița says. It was in Cadea where he became in touch with young people who had grown up without families and were very lost. "I'm happy for the young employees at FCE and hope they will work until they retire, but it's a big difference today and they will never know

what it was like for the abandoned young people in Cadea. I saw it and I will never forget it!"

Ionița was responsible for the FCE warehouse in Abram and also had other administrative tasks such as: contracts, insurance, purchases, all vehicles and transportation. He has been involved in every building purchase and remembers the names of all former owners. He also seems to remember the licence plates of all the cars that have been and are still owned by FCE!

Ionița explains that the first house and land that FCE purchased was on Bălcescu Street nr.77 in Marghita and that was in 1998. This became the first transit home and was a very simple accommodation for the employed couple and the five boys who moved in. Outside there were pigs, chicken, rabbits and cultivated land to take care of. (On that land the office and Club now stand.) Then the house adjacent to this one was purchased which became a hair salon (and today is Casa cu Flori family home). After that a house in Chiribiș, one in Poiana, Casa Silvia home and so on.

"I remember," Ionița says, "that my boss, Lars, said in the beginning that if we can save five abandoned children out of one hundred, that is a big thing. Today we see from the results that many, many more than that have been rescued!" Ionița shares that he has seen things that he didn't think were possible and that he has great respect for the young people who have grown up in the orphanages and become integrated into society.

"I have seen simple people from different nationalities reach out their hands and together we have given hope to these children and young people," Ionița says, and finishes with the words, "You can't bring anything with you when you die but the good things you have done for others will continue to live."

From Marghita to Stockholm

Sofia Gustafsson is one of the volunteers who was there when the work of FCE started 25 years ago. After a total of 13 years altogether in Marghita, she has now moved to Sweden.

“My main work in Marghita has been to support and guide young people who have grown up in state run orphanages. I have had the opportunity to see amazing changes in these young people’s lives but it has taken time. To see how they slowly begin to heal, that they can care about other people and live an independent and purposeful life is the best salary one can get!

Some years ago, I was thrown into, what was to me then, an unknown and frightening world – human trafficking! Some of the girls I had got to know through our work were tricked and pulled into this cruel business in different ways. There was nothing else we could do but try to help them in the best way we could.

Many rescue operations were made and we succeeded in bringing some of them home. This was an unsettling and thought provoking time and I became determined to do what I could to help these girls who had been exploited, but also to work preventatively so that no more of them would end up in the claws of the traffickers. My involvement with these exposed girls grew more and more.

In June 2013, we had a visit from NMT (The National Method Support Team against prostitution and human trafficking) from Sweden. A childhood friend of mine, Simon Haggström, who works as a group manager at the prostitution unit with the police in Stockholm, initiated the study trip to Marghita. They had seen an increase in the number of Romanian girls (mostly Roma) who were used in human trafficking in Sweden. Their visit was very rewarding for us and our young people and we understand that it was also a meaningful journey for our guests.

Ever since NMT visited us, I have had the desire to make a study visit and meet people who fight against human trafficking in different ways. In May 2015, I had the opportunity to spend a few days in Stockholm. Little did I know that those days would bring about so much change.

I had the opportunity to meet Anna and Jose-

phine, two amazing women who run a Christian non-profit association called Talita. They help women who have been used in prostitution and trafficking for sexual causes. They run protected housing, a call-in centre and they offer long-term support through trauma therapy, teaching and future planning. I had heard so many good things about these enthusiasts and I had looked forward to meeting them and to exchange experiences.



Sofia before she leaves Marghita

I was also able to meet some of the many Romanian girls who are used in prostitution in Stockholm. Their suffering affected me greatly and I just knew that my calling is to help these girls. There are many amazing people who make a huge effort for these exposed girls in Stockholm, but there are few who actually speak the Romanian language and are also familiar with their culture. I was shaken up, to say the least, after these meetings. I went to Stockholm with the purpose of learning more and exchanging experiences and I left Stockholm with a bleeding heart for these girls and a job offer!

Due to illness, I have been on sick leave lately, which means others have taken over some of my work responsibilities. It is amazing to see our young Romanian colleagues who are on fire for this work and are growing in maturity and responsibility. God knew that I would never had been able to leave if I had been in the middle of everything. He actually used my sick leave to make the parting less painful.

It was hard to leave the children and young people in Marghita but I rest assured that God has everything and everyone in his hands. It

"Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."

Jesus, Matt 25:40

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Sofia's story continues

makes things easier knowing that I will continue to have a strong connection to the work of FCE in Marghita. The relationships I have, I want to continue to take care of. I didn't get a new calling; I'm just changing locations!

My part-time work at Talita will also mean quite a lot of contact with Romania and regular visits there, since I will be responsible for the work with following up the Romanian women who received help from Talita and will return to their home country, where Talita wants to offer them continued support.

The work of FCE in Marghita continues. I warmly recommend you to continue supporting the work, which is entirely dependent on voluntary gifts. If you are not a sponsor already, please join us with your support!

Sofia Gustafsson

**Warm greetings,
FCE**

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