

Having heard about the work in Romania in a Medlink conference, I decided it was something I really wanted to get involved in. I first went to Romania in Easter 2004 and although I was very nervous at the time, it was one of the best decisions I ever made.

The first time I met the morning children I found it a quite a shock, as it was evident how little care and attention they had received during their lives. However, it was comforting to talk to the other students in the same situation, as well as chatting to Sarah (who was our team leader) and of course the Romanian team, who are all so unbelievably welcoming. As a result, it didn't take long before we settled in and began to enjoy working with the children as well as finding it rewarding.

Since my first trip I have been out to the centre 3 more times and over that time I have been so lucky to see the huge changes in many of the children. I have seen children learn to walk, learn to talk and learn how to play and to me, it proved just how invaluable the time they spend at the centre is, and what a huge difference it makes to their lives. I worked particularly with a little girl called Gabi and the progress she has made over the time I have been going to Romania has been amazing. She has since been adopted and to visit her in her new home has been one of the highlights of all my trips to Romania.

However, sometimes working with the children can be hard. In Easter 2006 we worked with the children in their apartments and I found it quite upsetting to see them in such an unstimulating and miserable environment. However, it was brilliant to be able to take the children out of that environment to the park and it was also nice to work with some of the children who don't come to the centre and to know that otherwise they would not be able to go outside.

When I first met the afternoon group, I really loved working with them as they have so much love to give and any little thing means so much to them. However it did upset me that the children had little sense of identity, particularly the fact that they all had to have their hair cut short, so had little gender identity.

In October 2004 I was lucky enough to attend the opening of the family home which was such an exciting event for everyone involved and a culmination of such a lot of hard work. Seeing the children living in the family home as a proper family, how much they adore Sandu and Alex and how much they are all changing is fantastic. It is easy for anyone who goes to see how growing up in such a loving, warm environment is rubbing off on the children and to see them care for each other, play together and be so happy and secure is an invaluable experience.

