

## My Experience

Bacau, Romania



For the first few days we stayed in a centre for street children set up by FSC, where we spent a lot of time getting to know each other and the other Romanian volunteers. Everyone got on really well together and the Romanian volunteers were so good at making us feel welcome. Gaby and the volunteers took us on various trips: shopping, bowling, on a trek up the mountains, film nights, etc. which was great fun. It felt almost like a holiday! Everyone was so lovely and really went out of their way to make us feel welcome.

The second half of the trip was spent in our designated village: Podu Turcului. It was quite a shock when we first arrived: the village was far away from any of the main roads, and it was obvious that it was very poor. And this was apparently the better off of the villages FSC is affiliated with! We were working from the second we got there, literally! A group of children were waiting for our arrival, so as soon as we had carried the cases to our room we were outside starting the summer school.

The children were divided into age groups, which ranged from about 5 to about 17, and spent an hour in each of four classes: sport, dance and singing, English, and arts & crafts. It was hard at first because of the huge language barrier, because we quickly developed ways of communicating. It was a huge help having the Romanian volunteers there with us as they could sort out any huge problems!

The summer school lasted for 5 days in total, and each day we rotated as to which class we would run. The children learnt new dances and songs every day, and the content of the English, art, and sports classes also changed. It was hard to keep things completely original: Gaby's main concern was keeping the children constantly entertained so that they would come back the next day. But we had all brought loads of stuff with us from home that we were able to use to keep everyone entertained!

The children were absolutely lovely. It was clear from the moment we arrived that they were excited to have us! I remember having to break up a fight between three girls as to who was going to hold my hand! They were all very excitable and wanted to play all the time, but it was always fun and never boring so it wasn't a problem. At times it was hard to keep them well behaved- there were quite a few fights that could have become serious, especially the ones between the boys, and sometimes they would get stropky when they were bored or wanted to be in another class. But having the Romanian volunteers there made this a lot easier to deal with!

The accommodation was very basic: no running water after 6pm, no hot water at all, sleeping on the floor etc. but it really wasn't a problem, it was all a part of the adventure. I think if we really wanted to appreciate what it's like for the children in this village, we had to live like they do. And I think we were in luxury compared to what most of them have to cope with! We had to move accommodation after the first night due to a cockroach infestation, which wasn't very nice, but we all coped fine and actually ended up in an old school on BEDS!

Overall it was an absolutely fantastic experience and I would definitely love to go again. The children were lovely, and I learnt so much about their way of life. It was a very rewarding experience, knowing that when the children were at the summer school, they weren't out working on the fields. I learnt to appreciate the finer things in life so much more, like hot water and soap! I became very close to some of the children, and

it was sad to leave them, but it was such a great feeling when they got to know you and would follow your very move to be with you!

The trip was tiring and very hard work at times, but I think when you remember the reason why you are there and the good things you are doing for other people, it makes it all worthwhile. I would definitely recommend it to anyone and I would love to go again!