

Frontline Bulgaria

MARCH 2012 Newsletter 21



News Update following the visit of Mary Hill, Gill Soper and Paul Bamlett (Actability) to Ruse 20th-29th March

If you have followed our recent visit to Ruse on Facebook, you will know that Paul ('Actability'), supported by Daniela ('Friendship'), ran 12 drama workshops, involving more than 500 children and young people in day centres, special schools, mainstream kindergartens and Ruse Theatre. They made great connections into Ruse's thriving performing arts scene and featured on TV and in the press, setting the stage for some exciting work in developing inclusive arts in the future. One of the most enduring images for Mary and Gill was catching sight of the colourful parachute as we turned the corner into Baba Tonka Str. - giving a whole new meaning to 'street drama'!

Cristian and Stefan from 'Motivation Romania' met us in Ruse to arrange provision of special wheelchairs for two children, as well as adaptations to other wheelchairs. It's difficult to describe the profound relief expressed by the families of children and young people when they receive suitable equipment that is generally unobtainable in Bulgaria. A grandmother wept when she first saw the wheelchair for her profoundly disabled grandson.

But provision of equipment is only one aspect of the role of an Occupational Therapist. This role essentially includes assessment of the child's living environment, mobility, functional skills, and opportunities for inclusion at home, school and in the community. The nature of our short-term visits often limits our capacity to offer adequate assessments and interventions. But Occupational Therapy is steadily developing as an established profession in Bulgaria, as OT students and graduates from Ruse University have increasing opportunities to study and gain practical experience alongside their counterparts from Europe and USA. We continue to seek funding for a partnership project to provide longer-term placements for UK OT's.

Having previously met her at Baba Tonka house, we visited a child in her mainstream school where she is fully accepted by supportive staff and well integrated with her peers but still faces many environmental and physical barriers to independence, mobility and inclusion.

We were delighted to participate in 'Café Society', the latest initiative of the Elias Canetti Society in partnership with Karin Dom Foundation. The aim is to encourage community-building and social action. After giving a PowerPoint presentation about Frontline's work in Essex and Ruse, we ran a typical Frontline 'Community Links Forum' in which each person has just two minutes to share something about their organisation, a forthcoming event or news item etc. In the absence of our usual kitchen timer gadget, we improvised with a toy xylophone! There wasn't time for



all the participants to speak. So we used a simple (but risky!) selection strategy – those who chose a brown sweet spoke and those who chose a white sweet didn't! To their credit, the group quickly got into the swing of it, most speakers timed their 2 minutes to perfection and the meeting ended with people chatting and exchanging contacts and information with one another. The formula seemed to work well – much to the relief of the organisers!



With a load of equipment due to leave PhysioNet in Yorkshire on 31st March, the pressure was on to find a large storage space for the special seating, walkers, wheelchairs etc. Thanks to the tireless efforts of our friends in Ruse, as well as new contacts through Facebook and LinkedIn, we were able to consider several options. Because of the size of the vehicle and uncertainty about its' exact date and time of arrival, we arranged for it to be delivered initially to a professional (but costly!) warehouse. Mary and Gill (plus husbands!) are returning in early May to help relocate the equipment to longer-term storage which children, families & carers can visit and where their needs can be assessed. However, 'where' is not yet confirmed and we are *urgently* seeking funding for this project!



As always Friendship Church provided endless help, including Velizar who emerged as a gifted translator! We were pleased to meet OT students (Iona, Lyndsey, Kelly and Katie) on placement from York University, and their Tutor Debbie. We enjoyed a lovely meal with Liliya and Petya and their professional colleagues from Ruse University. And we met many generous-hearted people for the first time who, together with our 'old' friends, often went that extra mile to 'open doors' and help make things happen!



'THANK YOU' to all who have supported 'Frontline Bulgaria' during the last 6 months, through many expressions of goodwill, material and financial donations, practical help, prayer support and encouragement. TOGETHER we can make a difference!

Actability + MIMN + Friends of Bulgaria + PhysioNet + A2HW + G&S Smirthwaite Ltd + Delamode Braintree + Motivation Romania + Friendship Church + Sawyers Church + New Church Suffolk + York St. John University + Ruse University + FSCI + Karina + individual donors and many other NGO's, friends and colleagues in the UK and Bulgaria.

ARE YOU an O.T. or PHYSIO with an interest in areas such as paediatrics, posture management, seating and mobility?

Would you consider joining a volunteer Frontline team going to Ruse for a week in early July 2012? You'd need to be self-funding but the rewards are great!

To find out more, please contact Gill Soper on thesopers@thesopers.wanadoo.co.uk

Please pass this request on!

We URGENTLY need funds for moving and storing equipment!

Please consider whether you could support 'Frontline Bulgaria' by going to the Bulgaria page on www.frontlinepartnership.org

to donate through 

Thank you!



To follow Frontline's activities in Brentwood and Bulgaria, please go to:-

<https://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/pages/Frontline/230118597029618> (Frontline)

<https://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/groups/168403349855340> (Frontline Bulgaria News)

FRONTLINE enables and supports people with a learning disability and high support needs to live full and productive lives through their active inclusion, participation and contribution in the community

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