

faith in action

All for love's sake!

Youth leader Clare Mutch took a group of Salisbury teenage volunteers to Bulgaria to work with orphans. As SIMON WATKINSON found out, both groups of young people had their lives changed by the experience



FOR the past three winters, The Trussell Trust (TTT) has raised £4000 to feed the 70 children living at Lipnitsa orphanage and school. Lipnitsa is a remote rural mountain village just outside Botevgrad, a town about an hour and half from the Bulgarian Capital, Sofia.

Last August, Clare Mutch, Bulgaria projects officer for TTT and youth leader at St Paul's, Salisbury, took four 18-year-olds from Encounter youth group to Bulgaria to help out at an annual summer camp for the Lipnitsa children.

The first three days of the trip were spent acclimatising and enabled the four teenage Bulgarian translators to get to know the UK team with whom they would be working.

"We all met up with the children for the first time as we boarded the coach for the nine-hour journey from Botevgrad to Kranevo on the Black Sea. They were so excited!" Clare told me when we met in Salisbury. "Before long laughter filled the coach and it was as if we were all old friends. The acceptance and trust was amazing. It was truly God at work, and throughout the whole holiday the children were just so loving."

"Being mainly from Roma communities, the kids are extremely marginalised," Clare said. "They all know real poverty – their only hopes and dreams in life are to eat."

Gorgi (14) and Misho (13) are from Sofia and their parents are both drug addicts. Last winter holiday they had nowhere to live and so broke into cars to sleep at night, until the police caught them. "They are so much fun and so loving that it is hard to believe that they live in institutions," Clare said.

Niki (16) and Gorgi (15) have now left Lipnitsa but TTT pays for their ongoing education, food, transport and clothes. "Their parents abandoned them when they were four and five years old respectively," Clare said. "Niki just remembers his mother beating him with a wooden stick and Gorgi withdraws into himself whenever his parents are mentioned. They were recently taken in by a very loving Bulgarian couple who are smallholders. They grow in confidence every time I see them."

"I got to know 40 of these won-

derful kids at the camp and the thought that some of them may be absent from next year's camp because there was no food is heart-breaking," Clare reflected.

If funds aren't secured, then the orphanage will close and the children will end up on the streets for the winter where they quickly fall victim to violence, drug addiction, prostitution and criminal activities. Sadly, some of them may even face death.

Clare then related the privilege of watching the youth team, whom she has long known, mature as Christians. "Suddenly they were in a situation where peer pressure was unimportant and they were taken for just who they were! Barriers came down and they also shared

... just loving these children made such a difference

their faith with the translators. Seeing some of the quieter, more disturbed kids responding to the love, care and attention of the youth team and losing their timidity was quite miraculous."

The team felt that God had them just where he wanted them and so allowed him to lead them in new ways. "I am sure that each young person would say that they came home new, after experiencing God's awesome power," Clare said.

All team members said the expe-



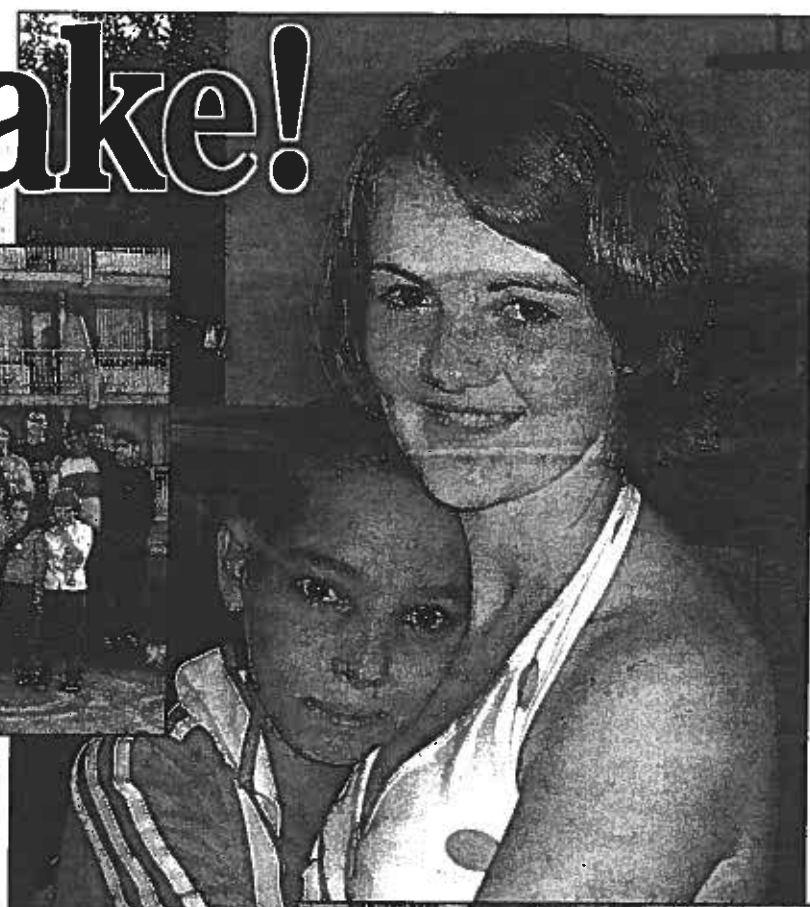
rience has made them think seriously about working in missions. The worst part, though, was leaving the kids at the fortnight's end.

"It made me think how we don't appreciate what we have," admitted Lucy Farnsworth. "It was wonderful how the kids returned our love. Whenever I'm struggling in my faith, I'll look back and remember just how faithful God is when you trust him."

Susanna Clark said: "I learnt the importance of spending time in His presence each day, and seeking his will. Every time we prayed about a particular problem or relationship, the prayer was answered! Praying with one of the children was a real privilege and a very special moment for me."

Steve Dew-Jones thought the trip was the best experience of his life: "The kids' ability to love when the world doesn't seem to care about them just blew me away."

And Naomi Durston commented: "It was amazing to see how just loving these children made such a difference. All we took was love and they gave so much back."



It's clear proof of the life-changing effect of loving those to whom Jesus calls us.

● It costs only £14 a month to feed a child three meals a day at Lipnitsa. The orphanage receives its small funds from the State again at the end of March. Despite the area's extreme poverty, The Trussell Trust (Registered Charity No. 1061207) is currently researching the possibility of a sustainability project where profits from a business could be ploughed back into the school.

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PRIZE WORDSEARCH

Jesse's branch

Hidden in the grid on the right are key words from Isaiah 11:1-5, and 9 (NIV). Words may be forwards, backwards, horizontal, vertical or diagonal – but always in a straight line. Just draw a line through the words as you find them. Several letters are used more than once. Words to find are in CAPITALS.

For your chance to win a book prize, send your completed wordsearch, together with your name and address, to:

CH Prize Wordsearch, Christian Herald, Christian Media Centre Ltd, Garcia Estate, Canterbury Road, Worthing, West Sussex BN13 1EH

by 8 December. The first correct entry to be selected on that date will win a prize.

A SHOOT will COME UP from the STUMP of JESSE, from his ROOTS and BRANCH will BEAR FRUIT. The SPIRIT of the LORD will REST on him – the SPIRIT of WISDOM and of UNDERSTANDING, the SPIRIT of COUNSEL and of POWER, the SPIRIT of KNOWLEDGE and of the FEAR of the LORD – and he will DELIGHT in the FEAR of the LORD. He will NOT JUDGE by WHAT he SEES with his EYES, or DECIDE by WHAT he HEARS with his EARS; BUT with RIGHTEOUSNESS he will JUDGE the NEEDY, with JUSTICE he will GIVE DECISIONS FOR the POOR OF THE EARTH. He will STRIKE the EARTH with the ROD of his MOUTH. With the BREATH of his LIPS he will SLAY the WICKED. RIGHTEOUSNESS will be his BELT and FAITHFULNESS the SASH ROUND his WAIST – FOR the EARTH will be FULL of the KNOWLEDGE of the LORD as the WATERS COVER the SEA.

Ann Routley

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