

## England 2 Moldova 2

### Theo scores his first goal for England\*

‘Cheers, mate’; ‘thanks’ on the buses or a nod and a smile in North Street just did not happen in Ialoveni.

Grinding poverty and an unhelpful political history have produced a stoney-faced culture. But the hospitality we enjoyed on our ten day visit to Moldova couldn’t have been more open and generous.

Seven of us from around Marcham set out to visit the Christian charity, Agape, in Ialoveni, 10km from the capital of the Republic of Moldova, Chisinau.

We flew to Bucharest, in Romania, then a 14 hour train journey (1950 East German stock) to Chisinau through fields of sunflowers and maize, strip farming and ruins of deserted Soviet factories littering the landscape with broken concrete and rusting metal. There were occasional groups of folk minding a few goats or a couple of cows.

The link began with a trip organised by Abingdon School. After that Graeme Innes spent his Gap year working with Agape, learning to speak fluent Romanian and imbibing the culture. Graeme guided us at high speed around rutted,

unlit roads, over bridges with holes in, in and out of the poorest homes, sampling local delicacies, on and off over crowded minibuses. (36 once counted in a 12 seater Mercedes).

Marcham village had been knitting for the very cold winters. Money was raised to buy equipment for the Holiday Club we were to run for children aged 8-14. There was plenty to leave behind at the Agape Community Centre where we were based. The children enjoyed the sports equipment, especially the parachute, although the extreme heat meant we could only play early in the day. We taught them games and crafts and the T-shirts left over from the tie-dying will enable some to have shirts to go to school in September. The children enjoyed all the football favours we collected (thanks, Marcham School). The shirts and caps were taken for everyday wear. How does that place them now the national under-21 teams have played each other? The Moldovan team we worked with were grateful for all we left behind.

We stayed with families and appreciated generous hospitality. Electricity was left behind from Soviet times. Gas supplies are used as a political pawn. Water for most people is from the nearest well; we had a tap in the garden. Diet is dependent on what their patch of garden

can produce, fruit and vegetables, and a pig, goat or fowl. Our goat was put out of the gate in the morning and came knocking to be let in at night! A diet based on potatoes, cabbage, marrow, eggs and goats cheese was healthy for us. Longer term many looked seriously lacking in energy.

Lack of employment has meant that many have gone overseas looking for work, largely to Spain and Italy, leading to many social problems. Children grow up alone, families break up and turn to alcohol. The population of Ialoveni has decreased from 20,000 to 10,000 in ten years.

We were all under 22 years old, except for me. The children tried to guess my age and decided on 48! In a country where life expectancy is 58, to be active at 65 is unheard of. We have so much to be thankful for.

*Pamela Shirras*

*\* Tuesday 15 August at Ipswich*

**All are welcome at  
All Saints’ Church  
every Sunday  
at 10am and 6pm.**

On 3 September and 1 October there will also be services at All Saints’ at 8am and at St Luke’s at 1030am.

more information on 391319