

## HUMANITARIAN AID PROJECTS

Written by Anouk

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"Tzedaka" is one of the core values of Judaism. Helping the less fortunate, the sick, the elderly and fellow human beings in times of calamities, is indeed our way of life. The concept of solidarity was and is the "raison d'etre" of our organization, B'nai B'rith.

In order better to organise the flow of communication and information among the lodges from Central and Eastern Europe on one hand and Western Europe on the other, in 1997 we set up the Committee for Central and Eastern Europe. Information about the lodges' priorities, activities and needs could be monitored and disseminated to the rest of the lodges in Europe in a more efficient manner.

**In 1999, the Dutch government**, the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, offered support from the Nazi Persecutee Relief Fund to survivors of the Nazi persecution in Central and Eastern Europe. BBE applied for a grant and got US \$1.2 million for humanitarian aid projects in six countries: The Ukraine (Kiev and Lviv), Romania, Russia (St. Petersburg), Latvia and Lithuania: in these countries we subsidized food supplies and medical care. In Hungary the project was devoted to the renovation of the Centre for mentally challenged adults.

**The project "Foster Grand Parent Plan, Romania"** has been running since 2002. Two volunteers from the Bucharest B'nai B'rith Lodge (Forum Dr. Moses Rosen), together with the local Jewish social services, made a list of needy, old and sick Jewish people. These people live alone at home and do not get assistance from other organizations. Their monthly income is 30-50 euro. From this they cannot pay the rent, electricity, food, medicine and the needed help in house. Each of them is physically and or mentally disabled. The local volunteers visit each of the people on the list in Bucharest and the provinces and put together a social-medical dossier that is up-dated twice a year, each time just before they get the financial aid from us. We send the aid in two parts: once during the summer and once during the winter, each time 180 euro per person, for a total of 360 euro per year per person. The operational costs were kept at a minimum of 10 euro per person, per year. Over the last 11 years, we helped on an average 125 persons per year (360 euro X 125 persons= 45.000 euro per year X 11 years), for an amount of 495.000 euro.

**The financing of the Jewish Old Age Home, Bucharest**, falls under the responsibility of the Federation of the Romanian Jewish Communities. Since the government and the Joint have drastically reduced their subsidies to the social sector, the Jewish Old Age Home can hardly cover its expenses. Therefore they are increasingly dependent on donors from the West. Over the years they needed our help with paying for incontinence pampers for the elderly bed ridden residents (6.750 pampers for a total of 2.525 euro); renovation of the kosher kitchen (1.700 euro + 698 euro for an industrial meat grinding machine= 2.398 euro); linoleum for 10 rooms (3.350 euro); thermo door (550 euro) and window (365 euro); 1 hot meal on wheels (1.300 euro); 10 orthopedic mattresses (670 euro); Pesach packages (1.143 euro); renovation & painting of 11 rooms (825 euro); coffee break items for 1 year and decorations for the common room (540 euro). In total we sponsored 13.666 euro.

**The Jewish Medical Center, Bucharest**, has the same financial problems as the Old Age Home. We helped them by sponsoring some equipment for the department of ophthalmology and stomatology as well as medicines and vitamins for a total value of 2.300 euro.

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The BB lodge, Forum Dr. Moses Rosen, Bucharest, got some financial help from the BB lodge from the Netherlands (Amsterdam) and from France for helping the needy during the Pesach holiday (food packages) and to organize picnics for the ambulant residents of the Old Age Home.

### **BULGARIA**

In the late nineties we sponsored new furniture for the Jewish old Age home in Sofia. In 1998-99 we helped finance a bone marrow transplant for a child who suffered from leukemia. The transplant was done in Jerusalem at the Hadassah Medical Center. For the last few years we help sponsor a project done by the B'nai B'rith loge Carmel Sofia, for Holocaust Education for high schools.

Article by Erika van Gelder