

Journey

HELPING CHURCHES HELP THE POOR AND OPPRESSED
INTERNATIONAL TEAMS AUSTRALIA NEWSLETTER / DECEMBER 2010

A Gentle Touch

Amanda Lewis has been serving in Timisoara, Romania in ministries to children at risk

Baby Ema* has never felt the touch of her mother's hand on her forehead nor the enveloping embrace of a father's arms.

Like so many babies in Romania, Ema was abandoned at the baby hospital because her mother could not care for her. Perhaps there were too many children in the family already or her mother was but a child herself. Ema lived her whole life inside a tiny cot. No crawling, no cuddles and no interaction with other children. She occasionally left her cot for medical checks or the rather infrequent nappy change or wash. Ema didn't know what love was until Amanda Lewis, from Sydney, arrived in Romania, a country she never knew existed until just a year earlier.

Amanda has always had a deep passion for children.

From May 2008 to August 2010 Amanda served with International Teams in a number of ministries to at risk children and young people in Timisoara, Romania.

Amanda would come to the hospital and take Ema out of her cot, hold her, play with her and introduce her to new textures, colours, sounds and smells. Over time, Amanda helped Ema to walk and interact with other children, often by using an old mattress as a play mat for a few children at a time.





Once abandoned babies reach a certain age they are transferred from the hospital to an orphanage for older children. Many children and adults in Romania suffer from severe mental and physical disabilities, because like Ema they have been confined to a life inside a cot, on a bed or in a room at most, with very limited opportunity for physical, mental or emotional stimulation. Amanda's work with Ema and other abandoned babies and orphans will help them to keep developing, despite the many challenges of life in these places.

Amanda also served as craft coordinator at the Potters House, which is a partner in ministry with International Teams and other organisations. The Potters House runs a number of community programs, including a day centre, which is a prevention program for children from disadvantaged families.

It is at the day centre that children receive help with their homework, do craft, play games, learn how to use computers, eat regular healthy meals, learn about good hygiene and above all, hear about the love of Jesus.

For one family of nine children, the Potters House is like a second home. They only go home to sleep as, amongst other things, their father suffers from mental illness and since neither of their parents work, the family relies on government food coupons to survive.

It is now 21 years since the Revolution and the fall of the oppressive Communist regime in December 1989 in Romania. While life in Romania has been continually improving

since the Revolution, there is still a vast gap in living standards between cities and rural areas, and mental illness, alcoholism and unemployment remain significant issues for this nation. Potters House runs Monthly Medical Missions, regular children's programs and makes visits to juvenile prisons and nursing homes in the villages to help address these issues.

Potter's House also runs camps and Amanda led on many camps for children and teenagers, in Romania and throughout Eastern Europe. A

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9 year old boy called Alin* attended one of the camps with Potter's House in 2009. Amanda described Alin at the start of camp as grumpy, closed and given to creating mischief with the other children.

On this camp the kids and leaders slept in tents, so when Alin began screaming in his tent on the first night, the whole camp heard. But not Alin – the next morning he was completely oblivious to it. When the screaming started the following night, not too long after the children were in their tents, the leaders gathered around Alin's tent and on the boundaries of the campground and prayed for Alin, against this spiritual attack. The screaming stopped and from that night on, the leaders continued to pray and the whole camp including Alin, were able to sleep in peace.

By the end of the camp he was different. He talked freely with the leaders he had ignored only days before. When Amanda visited his village at Easter this year, she was confronted with a truly happy Alin, smiling, laughing and confident. Something had left him and he was now a child of God.

Amanda's heart broke time and time again as she worked with babies and young people in Romania.

She says "At the birthday party the Potter's House threw for me this year, as the children prayed for me, one young boy prayed 'God, if you need to send Manda to a place where children need her more than we do, that's ok, but if not, please bring her back to us.'" Amanda will never forget this young boy's faithful prayer.

Amanda will continue to serve with International Teams in Australia while she studies for an Associate Degree of Theology at Sydney Missionary and Bible College in 2011-12. With her growing vision to serve in youth ministry, she hopes that her studies will further equip her to share God's love with children and young people on the mission field, in Romania or wherever God may lead her.

Naomi Jones

** Names have been changed*

Amanda has been awarded Alumnus of the Year 2010 by her high school, William Clarke College, in recognition of her service and ministry in Romania. International Teams congratulates Amanda on this achievement!

Young Lives in Cambodia Transformed



Coleen Briggs is an International Teams Missionary from the United States, serving in Cambodia at the Shalom Centre

As refugees in Cambodia, the 50 children who attend the Shalom Centre, face many dangers and difficulties in their daily life. Violence, abuse, malnutrition, poor health and people traffickers are among the risks they face. At the Shalom Centre, a primary school for Vietnamese refugees, these children receive lessons in math, Khmer, Vietnamese, Bible and health and safety.

Recently one of our students told her teacher that she and her brother were living on their own in their houseboat, except at night when their uncle stays with them, as their parents had gone up river to fish. One evening she was watching a storm roll in and was afraid their houseboat could be shoved off shore and float away. As she is a small girl and her brother is still quite young, they would not be able to secure it on their own, so she began to pray. While she prayed, the wind and the waves died down and things became still. She also prays for her family, who have regularly gotten a larger catch of fish than their non-praying neighbours. I am so grateful that our Father is honouring her prayers and showing his power to this child in the faith.

One of our students, who came to the Centre when we began, was known for being a wild child who would get drunk regularly. Three years later, he is asking questions about God

and growing in his faith. The community and his parents have commented on how well he is doing. He is excelling in his studies and dreams of becoming a computer technician. At his recent birthday party, some of his friends complained that he only bought soft drinks and provided no beer!

He accepts these comments with a smile and has been open with his family about his faith in God. His parents have allowed him to abstain from participating in their Buddhist activities.

Another of our students, a new believer, asked for prayer and advice when she knew her relatives would likely pressure her to participate in some Buddhist rituals. She thought that if she refused her relatives would respond harshly. Not knowing exactly what to say, we teachers prayed and asked many others to pray for her too. On the day of the ritual, her little niece was so fussy and restless that she was asked to take care of the child all day and was excused from the Buddhist "festivities".

One of our core values is to openly proclaim Jesus to our students while allowing them the freedom to study at the Centre without pressing them to profess faith in Jesus. It is



very gratifying to hear unsolicited testimony that God is moving "big time" in the kids' lives and that some of them have made their own decision to turn to Jesus.

We have been blessed to see many children grow and change as they embrace the opportunities God is offering them through Shalom Centre.

My ministry partner and I really did not know what we were doing or how to run a school when we started three years ago and we have had to learn and make mistakes along the way. God has been faithful and forgiving of our mistakes and He deserves the glory.

Coleen Briggs

As International Teams seeks to help churches help the poor and oppressed, we have been able to link Gynea Baptist (NSW) with the Shalom Centre. In January 2011, the church will send its third short-term team to Cambodia. **Paul Summers**, Missions and Evangelism Pastor from Gynea Baptist writes:

"Over the years we have asked Coleen how we can assist her ministry in Cambodia. So far we have been able to provide a computer lab for the kids with brand new laptops, and while in the country we spend time praying with Coleen, teaching children and cleaning the school, along with various fundraising activities during the year to assist the annual budget. Coleen faces many challenges and to offer assistance - to use her words - helps her feel not so alone. Our vision is to continue to support Coleen along with our other partners long into the future."

Assistance from other churches is welcome. If your church would like to engage in similar programs, please contact us.

BY AIR MAIL
PAR AVION



❑❑ **PRAY** for those who have recently served and those who are currently serving with International Teams ministries to children at risk around the world. Ask for God's protection over children at risk this Christmas.

❑❑ **GO** where God leads you. If His Spirit is stirring you about need and opportunities, look at www.iteams.org.au and contact the Australian Office.

❑❑ **GIVE** to ministries to children at risk, including Molo Street Children Project, Kenya, The Potter's House, Romania or the Shalom School in Cambodia.



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Molo Street Children Project

Molo Street Children Project (MSCP) is an International Teams initiative in Molo, Kenya. The project seeks to keep children off the street and give them a brighter future. It was started in September 2003, when the first 5 boys were sent to school.

Molo is a busy rural town of approximately 100,000 persons in the Rift Valley of Kenya. There is extreme poverty and lack of basic life necessities, such as water, sanitation, medical care and electricity. The situation in the town and surrounding area has been made worse by a large number of displaced people due to tribal clashes, which date back to 1992.

Many parents leave their young children at home when they go out to do casual work. The children wander to the streets where they learn that if they beg, someone will give them something to eat or money. They also miss out on schooling because while primary education

is free, one must go through nursery education to access this.

The project runs a day centre where the children receive nursery education, and are introduced to Jesus, who loves them and provides for them. The day centre helps children get admitted to local primary schools. While they are attending the centre they get porridge in the morning, a hot lunch and tea and a snack before they go home in the evening. For some children these meals are the only ones they receive.

For example, John, aged 3 and his brother Kamau aged 6, live with their single mother, but they have been sleeping on the streets. Obamba and Dottie are from a family of three children. The two boys have spent many nights on the street. Recently their mother abandoned them and they are now being cared for by their grandfather.

*Sonia Donnan
International Teams UK*

Aussies Serving Short Term in Molo, Kenya

Molo Street Children Project is a haven amidst the cruel realities of life on the streets of Molo. Throughout our time at the MSCP, we were able to build relationships with the children and learn their stories, as we served alongside the dedicated team lead by Chris and Sonia Donnan in January 2010.



One story particularly stood out to us. Our first impression of Kariuki was of a very happy and friendly boy, always trying to be the centre of attention. However, this had not always been the case. Shortly before we arrived, Kariuki had been found wandering the streets, having escaped from his abusive father. MSCP provided shelter for Kariuki on their site and taught him basic skills, such as showering and dressing. Through consistent care, attention and learning of God's love for him, he gained the confidence to care for himself. The once shy and timid Kariuki was transformed into a joyful, caring child.

It was with kids like Kariuki that we spent our time; assisting them with school work, playing games, singing songs and teaching Bible stories such as Noah's Ark, which we painted as a mural. Although we went to serve, we feel that we received just as much in return. What a blessing it was to experience the love of God for His children in action.

Cindy Shayesteh, Emily Sykes and Yolanda Varady-Szabo

Internships like this are available in many locations. Please contact us for details.