

Underground

MUZEUM

2010



english camp

Breaking most of the stereotypes I had of the Roma people (more commonly referred to as Gypsies), this camp opened my eyes to a whole new world.

There is such a diversity between the generations of this people group, as well as differences between Romanian and Serbian Gypsies, let alone other countries as well. One of the big differences I came to realise is, how much the youth want to take away the barriers that exist between them and the rest of society. They don't want to be seen as 'outcasts', but rather want somewhere to belong and a place where they can be accepted for who they are and not what people group they are apart of.

Three out of the four evenings of camp were spent at the Roma Cultural Centre. It was driving to, and being at the Centre, where I really saw the contrasts between the generations of the Roma people. Whilst the younger children and people from about the age of forty up were rather poorly dressed- holes in dirty clothing and children wearing shoes five times too big for them- the youth were dressed just like any other youth. If it weren't for their facial features, you might not be able to tell the Roma youth and other Serbian youth a part. One of the guys even asked if I had any hair gel as he wanted to look nice when he went out to be with his friends.

Everyone is searching for a place to belong; some where they feel safe and loved and not 'judged by their cover'. These Roma youth are just like anyone else, and this Youth English Camp was a way to show them the hope they can have in Christ.

Around five thousand Roma people live in Leskovac, in Southern Serbia; one thousand of which consider themselves Christian. The church where the camp was held, has Serbian, Chinese and Roma services each week, and each week the congregations are to full capacity.

Whilst hunger for food is a reality for these people, so is a deep hunger to 'belong'. Praise the Lord, many are finding this need met through the church in Leskovac. A great need, however, is that of discipleship. Whilst there are Roma people joining the family of Christ, nine from our camp alone, there is a great need for strong Christians to disciple these new believers.

Our camp, full of fun, sports and games, English lessons, discussion groups, fantastic Serbian food, the camp dance and more fun, was just the icing on the cake to leading these youth to a real relationship with Jesus. The camp theme was 'Underground', and over the week the youth were shown how we all live in the Underground which is dark, dirty and where we need to 'Mind the gap'. They were told about the hope we have to cross 'the gap' and that their is a way out, but that it is up to them to decide what they will do! Now the prayer is for these youth to grow and be nurtured, so that they can make a difference amongst their own people and to the rest of the world.

God is certainly at work, and I am just glad to be a part of His plans!!
May His name be forever glorified!! ~ Manda Lewis ~

