

Space restrictions in the usual 4pp format of the Newsletter meant that we were unable to include the full reports made by Carla Snell and Paul Rook following their visit with Adrian to Albania in August, so here they are now!

Adrian writes: "Carla has been such an important part of my visits over the years ... she brings so very much of herself to everything and everyone; her empathy, her interest in people, her love and sense of humour, her music ... her extraordinarily beautiful voice (no bias here!)"

And, for me personally, to have my own daughter not only willing to travel with her Dad, but also, seemingly, enjoying the experience ... what more could a Dad ask for?! Here is her report:

"The focus for me during the trip to Korce this year was really primarily about relationships, and developing more of my own sense of the kinds of projects I would like to potentially get more involved in longer term. Dad was going to be spending the majority of the trip focusing on an album recording with Nardi and working with Alda and the autistic young people, so this was a good opportunity for me to 'branch away' a little from the usual routine of previous years and think about the places and people I really wanted to invest my own time into. I also really wanted to find out more about the kind of work the Kenedi foundation are doing in the area of helping vulnerable young girls, teenagers and women (as this is where I feel most drawn to and passionate about). It was an extremely positive time, and as always there were many moments, meetings and experiences that I'd love to share, but have picked out just a couple that stood out to me over the time there.

It was great spending time with and getting to know a lovely young lady called Matilda, who is leading the girls work at the street kid's centre. It was really interesting to hear about where she's come from (born and raised in the Romani gypsy community) to where she is now – a life transformed by God, and with a heart for improving the lives of young street girls from the same background. She has experienced first-hand what it means to be a young Romani girl living in severe deprivation, segregated from the surrounding community, and the shocking things that a lot of them go through as young girls, and she is now doing some amazing work with

a number of those girls all from the outskirts of the town. She is helping to teach them a variety of basic life skills, most of which they would never learn elsewhere e.g. social skills, personal hygiene and looking after themselves physically, cleaning, sewing, cooking, arts and crafts and much more. I spent one afternoon at the day centre with her and some of the girls, where we made cards and friendship bracelets together which I really enjoyed. It was special to observe the dynamics between the group and how much the girls look up to Matilda and how good she is with them – very much like a big sister. Talking to Matilda over coffee though, I got the sense that there are some real struggles, especially when thinking about the future of this work. Firstly and unsurprisingly is funding - to be able to continue doing the work she's doing, and not only with the girls, but we talked about how amazing and beneficial it would be to start thinking about working more with mothers and other female family members from the same community. And also resources and expertise - someone to help structure the work and develop the skills and tools to help teach the girls the things they so desperately need to know about. It would be just so amazing to see this work grow and develop into something big where they are able to reach more of the young girls and other women, and to really see a shift

in their quality of life – something that it would be great for people to be praying about - for God to guide the way with this.

I went over to the girls safe house on my own for an afternoon and instead of playing music together like we would usually do, I wanted to just focus on being a friend to the girls and having some real good quality 'hang out' time. We chatted, laughed, played together, they showed me round their house and which bedrooms they all have now, and then we painted each other's nails whilst having drinks and biscuits. Although a real simple activity, it was an incredibly special time. I've loved getting to know these girls over the years and it was just really nice to be able to show them that I love them and care about them and just genuinely wanted to be with them for that time.

I also spent a bit more time over in Vlojisht this year, and was really excited to be able to take my boyfriend Paul with me. I've always had a soft spot for this village and it was great just to be there more, to get to know the people out there better, and see more of the work they're doing with the people in the village and building the church community. One afternoon I went on a home visit with Margarita who is one of the core church team members, to see four sisters. A couple of the sisters had previously been part of the church community but over recent months

haven't been around as much, apparently because their father has been making them work very hard at the house helping with renovations and doing cleaning, gardening and other hard labour etc. Although it was hard to get the full picture of what was going on for them and the family (as I believe there was more to it), it was great to see how the church really just want to get alongside people in



Carla's boyfriend, Paul Rook, joined us for this visit to Korce. It was his first time in Albania. He is trained in youth work, and works in London with vulnerable young people. He made an enormous contribution to our 'team', and here are some of his reflections and pictures.

The view was stunning; Scorching heat towering over the massive mountains that appear to reach the heavens, clear blue sky overlooking winding roads, acres of fields, woods, towns and lakes. I couldn't believe I was in Albania. After a long five hour drive with some near death experiences we had arrived at our final destination, Hotel Flamingo, Korce.

As soon as I had dumped my suitcase in my room we were back out again for the first meeting of the day. After a short walk along the cobbled streets my eyes locked onto the Red Tower, a new tourist attraction with spectacular views of the town and nearby villages and the main Orthodox Church called The resurrection Cathedral.

Our chosen coffee shop had a decent sized outdoor section with a small water fountain in front of it. It was not too busy and the music was clearly some mega-long playlist on Youtube. With coffee in one hand and a chocolate croissant in the other it was down to business. The aim of the meeting was to work out which of the Kenedi Foundation projects I was going to be involved in.

There were so many different projects: House on the Hill, The Orphanage plus the youth work in Vlocisht. I was like a child in the sweet shop. However nothing could prepare me for what happened next. Within a few minutes two very young boys approached our table, stretched out their arms, placed their hands in the air and boldly asked for money.

They must have been between 9 and 11 years old. Their appearance was scruffy; bare feet, ripped shorts, baggy t-shirts, black finger nails, and unkept hair. As the others carried on with the meeting, I struggled to ignore them. As I sipped my coffee I hoped they would be gone. Sadly this was not my last encounter with streets kids, but it was the one that left me reevaluating myself.

One of first places I got to see was the Villa Kennedy, a purpose built residential care home for the elderly. I was so impressed by the wonderful views that surrounded it. I liked how the garden was kept in such precise condition. So much care had been invested into it compared to the views that surround it. I felt it reflected the work that Marleen and her team give to help their clients have a fruitful life regardless of their age and ability to walk and/or talk.

My next highlight was leading a Bible



study with a group of young people in Vlocisht. I was invited to speak to the youth and my theme was to make the bible relevant to them as individuals and as group. So I decided to make their normal space into a court room with a judge and jury. Together we looked at whether Jesus was a crazy mad man who told lies... or the Son of God.

Their church pastor was the Judge (who kept order by banging on the table), the youth were the jury and I was the person giving the evidence. In the minutes I had, I presented several pieces of information: Millions of people agree and believe that Jesus existed. Then I took a story from the Gospel of Mark when Jesus heals two blind men by sticking his fingers in some mud. To make this really engaging and a lot of fun, I acted out the story of Jesus healing the two blind men.

This got the whole group (boys and girls) laughing and it was not long before their phones were out to record it all. The group were told that if they disagreed with something I said, they were to shout out 'No!' as loudly as they could. If they agreed with me, then 'Yes!' was to be shouted out nice and loud. I got a lot more 'yes's' than 'no's' but I think that was because I was picking on the junior leaders, 'casting' them as the Two Blind Men.

The youth loved the fact I was sticking my fingers in their leaders ears, whilst they all pulled faces at them! Of course they couldn't see this... they were blind! But the group were captivated and the suspense was killing them as they wanted to see if the junior leaders would be healed. In this case they were! And I was able to illustrate the story well enough for all the youth to know that the bible is important to read regardless of your beliefs because there is so much you can learn from the scriptures.

My last highlight from Albania was the work we did at the 'House on the Hill' (Adrian's alternative name for the 'Asil'... Asylum. I have never been in a place where so many people have been isolated simply because of their disability. I was shocked that families could put their loved ones in such a place and in some cases never return to visit them. This was so hard to accept as 'normal'. Their families are missing out on the joy I got to share with them. I got to dance with them, make music, explore the ocean, meet some see creatures and then have party!

For the time we were there, their disabilities were not on our agenda. Their personal situations and circumstances were not something to be concerned about as they engaged with all the activities from singing songs to sitting still and looking at their faces in a mirror.

Paul Rook

the community, wherever they are and whatever they're going through. On another afternoon in Vlojsh it was great and special to see my boyfriend Paul in his element, leading a Bible study with a large group of 11-16 year olds and then he went outdoors and played various games with some of the boys, whilst I spent some time with a group of girls. I set up a 'beauticians' table

and gave some of them proper manicures – a taste of the kind of manicure experience they would get here in the UK. This was also a really special time just hanging out with the girls and getting to know them better whilst teaching them the important skills of luxury manicures.

As always, the trip was full of a mix of good times, great times, hard times, uncomfortable

moments, special moments, spiritual moments and many unforgettable memories. As always, I remain so grateful to the Coverdale Trust who enable us to go out there year on year and who provide me with the opportunity to continue building and maintaining some really important and special relationships – thank you.

Carla