

Health Action Overseas Annual Newsletter

Partnerships in Disability

www.hao.ie

Carmichael House
Nth Brunswick St
Dublin 7
01-873 3173

Adrian's Story

Adrian Gheorghe was born on the 26th of November 1981. He was admitted to Negru Voda orphanage in 1984. When Babies of Romania was set up in 1991, Adrian was ten years old but he was still bottle fed, immobile and had no speech. Just before 2000 Babies of Romania changed their name to Health Action Overseas (HAO).

In 2000 HAO set up training and therapy programmes in Romania. Staff in Negru Voda were trained to take care of the children's needs through therapy and special education with help from Irish volunteers and specialist trainers. Adrian made major progress in self-care, mobility and speech. In 2002 Adrian moved into the HAO group home in Constanta. He got his first job, learned new responsibilities and lots of new skills. Now aged 27, Adrian and his best friends Zoro and Secin have their own semi-independent accommodation.

What are your likes and dislikes?

I like to work in a car wash. I

also like to live in a house, because in a flat I don't have as much freedom. I enjoy going to cinema, eating pizza and walking. I often listen to music and go to parties.

Do you enjoy your job and what to you do?

I wash, clean and wipe cars. I enjoy what



Highlight of the Year

Adrian, Zoro and Secin with the key to their new apartment.

I'm doing and I get along well with all my colleagues and the employer.

What was the best thing about moving into the group home in 2002?

In the group home I received more attention; we were less people and had more free time. I had more personal things for my own use and I could express my needs better.

How do you find semi independent living?

I like it because I do shopping for myself. I pick up my income by myself. I can take decisions on my own now and that's the best thing.

What is your daily routine like?

I wake up at 7 a.m.. I eat, wash, dress and go to work. I do my job very well. At 1am I have my lunch along with my colleagues and in the evening I get back home. Here sometimes I watch TV, talk to my friends and then go to sleep.

How do you feel about Health Action Overseas?

I like them a lot because they gave me the opportunity to get out of Negru Voda, to live in a house in the city and now I live a semi-independent life.

The above interview was recorded by Transition Year student Rachel Dillon.

Getting involved...

- HAO's **AGM** will take place on Sat 24th May at 10am at Carmichael House, North Brunswick St, Dublin 7. All members welcome.
- In June two canoeists will attempt to canoe the **Shannon** from start to finish in aid Of HAO. Please contact Audrey at 01 8733173 if you want to support for this very worthwhile endeavour.
- Internationally renowned harmonica player **Don Baker** has generously offered free downloads of his latest CD. You only have to make a donation of your choice through mycharity.ie.
- Are you a keen golfer? If so, why not join a team for HAO's annual **Golf Classic** at Tulfarris House, County Wicklow on Fri 2nd May?
- The HAO Annual **Fundraising Ball** will take place on Sat 20th Sept in Clontarf Castle, Dublin. Tickets €120 each or €1,200 per table. There will be a Tiger Woods signed golf glove and some Phil Lynnot memorabilia for auction.
- For more details on any of the events above please call **Audrey on 01 8733173**.

My visit to Anshun in Guizhou Province in China was certainly an unforgettable experience. I volunteered to go there in July 2007 during the summer teacher training programme to ensure funds were available to fund the building of three additional rooms at Anshun Orphanage.

Bob Keating and Gerry Heery from St. Gerards Special Needs School in Mullingar had arrived a week earlier. Apart from conducting their teacher training they had managed to get the School authorities to use a local builder to start work on the Orphanage housing project.

My arrival coincided with the arrival of the two Occupational Therapists from St Michael's House; Helen Gilbert and Sile Reynolds, who had volunteered to participate in the teacher training programme and also to carry out assessments of the children in the Orphanage.

Mr. Fan Yonglong, Principal of Anshun College, gave us a warm welcome. Special education continues to be a high priority for the college. HAO has been working in collaboration with the college and the Education Commission of Guizhou Province since 1988. They continue to look to Ireland for support and as a source of new strategies and ideas. This year for the first time HAO funded the additional input of two Occupational Therapists to the course content. The course opening got local TV news and an article published in the "Anshun Daily".

Bob Keating commented that "some of the teachers who attend the summer course came from the city and many rural villages scattered throughout the province where the sense of poverty and underdevelopment is part of the fabric of this society. They spoke of the lack of support, resources and equipment being common features in their schools, including no speech or language therapists for children who had speech, hearing and visual impairment."

Mr Wang, head of the Special Education Department, facilitated a visit to a newly built Special School at Songsan in, Ziyang County, which was being totally underutilized with an enrolment of only 34 residential students. Apparently families cannot afford to pay the €200 residential fee per year needed to attend.

One fond memory was the two hour journey into the mountains in the school van to meet a woman who was caring for her two deaf daughters. Bob in previous years had somehow heard of her through the college and donated his own funds to help H_ H_, her fourteen year old daughter to attend the special needs school. It was very humbling experience as the woman lived in very poor conditions yet had killed a chicken to provide us with a meal. HAO gave additional funds to cover this years education for F____, her second nine year old daughter, all of which seemed so inadequate in comparison

with her plight.

It was also through Anshun College and previous friendships generated by the Teacher Trainer volunteers that sufficient trust had been built up which enabled school authorities to facilitate a visit to an Orphanage near Toupu Village a few miles away.

The Orphanage is privately run by Mrs Xinying "Mama" and looks after a varying number (13 when we were there) of children and one 23 year old paralysed bed ridden young adult. Her single storey five room house is in a dilapidated condition with an outdoor toilet. She maintains vegetable plots beside the house. Her husband who drives a bus, has been responsible for finding some of the abandoned babies. We understand many of the children have been abandoned solely because they have a disability. Anshun is in one of the poorest regions of China and local government gives her €20 per month per child.



Lu Jun and Bob Keating working with staff in Anshun College

Mike O Keeffe & Bob Keating had in previous years donated funds to facilitate the purchase of toys and the building of a Solar bathroom Helen and Sile did great work during their short ten day visit, carrying out assessment on each child, washing, feeding, talking to Mama on care standards, meeting with the doctor and nurse, travelling into Anshun at night to buy a variety of items needed including basins, nappies, wipes creams, and toys.

Before leaving Helen had cut out a foam back rest to enable Z____, the young 23 year old paralysed man to at least sit up in his bed. His condition was particularly bad, and he was suffering from bed sores causing sleepless, pain-ridden nights. He had been homeless since age fourteen, and was paralysed in an accident two years ago. He has a TV, some books by the bed, but no access to light. When asked what he might like, he asked for a daily newspaper.

All the children need specialist care and some need specific medical interventions such as G____, a two month old girl with a cleft palate; M____, a five year old girl with

visual impairment and possible cataracts; S____, who has restricted left side movement; X____, a seven year old with speech impairment; J_ J_, a sixteen year old boy with language & learning difficulties.

Whilst there the builders were busy working on the three room extension (kitchen, medical & play rooms) which had reached roof level before our departure. It was gratifying to see some children out playing with toys previously provided.

We asked Anshun College to ensure the doctor and nurse were providing adequate care. HAO left €2500 to engage a helper and pay the balance towards equipment for the rooms when completed. Rooms need equipping, heating, tiling, flooring and water supply. Additional needs include a toilet upgrade, paving, refurbishment, heating and damp proofing. Helen left €500 to facilitate weekly visits from a masseur for the children and Bob left €600 to buy coal during the winter months where temperatures can reach minus 20C.

HAO has also offered to fund adequately trained helpers & medical interventions under the supervision and support of local authorities. HAO's ultimate goal is to help fund the establishment of a professionally managed unit of care in partnership with Local Government Authorities who may in time see it as a model worthy of establishing in other areas of need.

Lujun, the English language teacher provided by Anshun College, attended and looked after all the volunteer needs including interpretation.

Without the support of the Irish Embassy in Beijing (which annually funds the Teacher Training project), Anshun College, local authorities, the volunteers over the years, and above all those private donors who have made funds available to HAO, we would not be in a position even to consider further help. Hopefully the needs outlined above will continue to find more donors.

HAO plans to continue its partnership with Anshun teacher training college which has been operating now for ten years. We are also exploring the possibility of deepening our involvement in the special school sector in Guizhou province through collaboration with other facilities in Guiyang and Songsan. During 2008 we will also hold discussions aimed at identifying possible ways of supporting and improving the quality of services provided in the orphanage mentioned in Pat's article above.

New Accommodation at the end of the rainbow

In September, HAO hosted its inaugural black-tie “Rainbow Ball” in Clontarf Castle, to raise funds to purchase one apartment and rent a second as part of HAO’s social integration programme in Romania.

Over €100,000 was raised on the night and support and entertainment was supplied by Mary Black, Sharon Crosbie, Ann Bushnell and The Coronas. Further funds were raised by auctioning a number of donated items, including a 1 carat diamond valued at €8,000 donated by **Conway Jewellers**, paintings, a rugby shirt signed by the Irish national squad, as well as an apartment in Turkey donated by Caroline Healy from **CBC properties**.

The young adults moved into their new accommodation in October 2007, having already succeeded in moving from institutions to semi-independent living. They all have jobs in the locality, working in supermarkets and valeting businesses and are now enjoying living in the heart of their own communities.

Dublin plastering contractor Paul Traynor has been working with HAO for the last 4 years. “We are working with our partner organization in Romania, FVB, to ensure the young adults accessing our services are integrated into their own communities. Seeing their quality of life improving as a result of our efforts is enormously rewarding and is why I organised this black-tie event.”

HAO Chief Executive Officer, Audrey Cranston, was so delighted with the success of the charity event which had a “rainbow theme”, she took the decision to hold another black-tie ball next September.

“Based on the success of the ball, we have begun organising next year’s ball to be held on **September 22nd 2008**, again in Clontarf Castle. Many of those who attended the year’s event enjoyed it so much that they have asked to purchase tickets to next years event already. This is fantastic for HAO and we are now seeking donations of items to auction next year”.

The target amount Audrey plans to raise next

year is €150,000 and these funds will be used to initiate new projects in both Romania and China.

HAO has been operating projects in China for over ten years, including a summer school in the rural province of Guizhou to improve teaching methodology for children with disabilities.

“We are developing new projects in China which will involve offering medical and ongoing occupational therapy services to children with disabilities as well as further training for those caring for these children in schools and orphanages. But these initiatives require funds to organize and staff the projects so we need next year’s ball to be another resounding success”.

To donate an item for auction or enquire about tickets for the 2008 HAO Charity Ball, please mail info@hao.ie or contact Audrey at 01 8733173.

Ashling Keogh, HAO Board Member

Romania: A Personal View

James Dillon, HAO Board Member

Seven years after I watched the first group of volunteers heading to Negru Voda Orphanage in Romania, I wonder what they would make of it now. I have seen change slowly and painfully achieved through frustrating negotiation with the authorities in Romania and then followed up by countless fundraising events in Ireland. The change never looked dramatic to me; it was always never big enough or quick enough.



“Casa Catalina” New Group Home opened in Galati, Feb 2007, is now home for eight young adults who previously lived in the local state institution. Construction of this house was made possible with funds tirelessly raised by Paul Traynor and friends and Project Mustard Seed UK.

But in hindsight the changes are remarkable. I wish those involved, from the early volunteers to the trainers and project managers of recent times, could appreciate what they have achieved. Most of them finished their assignment feeling that what they had done was a tiny drop in the ocean. For many including myself “banging your head off a stone wall” comes to mind. I would like to take them back today to meet the “babies” of Romania who are now young adults. These children and young adults are scarred for life, having been brought up in a Romanian orphanage. However what is remarkable is the way they have dealt with the situation with courage, optimism and hope.

Take the young adults in the first Group Home, now living in an apartment. They are all working and are living a full life. When I first saw them as young children back in 1991, keeping them alive would have seemed like a success. Now they are kind, hard working and considerate. I would be proud to have them in my family. Where did they get this gentleness and generosity? I suspect at least a little from the volunteers and carers who worked with them.

HAO to me is like a family. I know that sounds positive but I mean it in a different sense. There are always problems, most of the time they are little ones, occasionally big ones which have to be dealt with. Just like a family I’ve seen volunteers mature and grow; I’ve seen the pain that some of them felt while working on the projects. Eventually most of them went their own way but I know in some way affected by their experience. However some stayed involved and helped us set up new projects in Romania as well as Albania and China.

The children and young adults have also changed. Some are living with profound disabilities and we will continue to support and advocate on their behalf. Sometimes we are their only voice. For the rest they are making the best of what they have and for our part we always want more for them.

Partnerships

in disability

Carmichael House Phone: 00 353 1 873 3173
 Nth Brunswick St Fax: 00 353 1 873 3006
 Dublin 7 Email: hao@iol.ie
 Ireland

HAO is a registered Irish charity which has run training, therapy and special education programmes overseas since 1991. Registered charity No. 10503. HAO is also registered as a company limited by guarantee. Company No. 407808.

HAO is not affiliated to any religious or political organisations.

Many people include charities in their Wills. HAO would be honoured to be included in your Will.

This newsletter is also available in large print format

Acknowledgements

Thank you!

A big thank you to our regular "Sponsor a Project" donors, and to those who completed tax relief certificates which enabled HAO to reclaim tax on all donations over €250 in any given year. If you require further details on this scheme please contact us. Thanks also to Project Mustard Seed for supporting the work of HAO over the last 8 years both financially and with expertise in special education, therapy and staff training.

If you know anyone interested in becoming a sponsor just ask them to contact us for details. Special thanks to all who helped with fundraising and individual donations. Donations and "Sponsor a Project" standing orders can be made through our website or by contacting Audrey Cranston at 01 8733173.

Fundraising can also be done through our webpage: www.mycharity.ie/charity/hao

Here you can create your own fundraising page, and get sponsored for events in aid of HAO. You can also donate through www.donationpoint.ie.

All of the above ways of raising money for HAO are safe, secure and easy!

We gratefully acknowledge Irish governmental support through Irish Aid and the Embassy of Ireland, Beijing.



LE Aoife and the Naval Service make a difference

The crew of the LE Aoife and the Naval Service, through hard graft and good endeavour, raised much-needed funds and resources for the young adults living in Group Homes in Romania.

We cordially invite supporters and contributors to apply for membership of HAO. Please contact us for an application form. All members are invited to our Annual General Meeting in Dublin.



Mary Black with HAO Director James Dillon at the HAO Annual Fundraising Ball 2007 which raised funds to purchase an apartment for young adults in Romania.

HAO Directors: Gerard Byrne, James Dillon, Richard Lee, Pat Vaughan, Ashling Keogh. **CEO:** Audrey Cranston.

HAO's partners overseas: *Fundatia pentru o Viata mai Buna (FVB), Romania, and Anshun Teacher Training College, China.*