

# MOLDOVA

*Clare McLoughlin*



JULY 26th had been earmarked on my calendar for my 4th trip out to an orphanage' in Moldova. It all started 5 years ago for me when I noticed advertisement on the internet asking for volunteers who would travel to Moldova with the organisation ORM to work with children and young adults who have been orphaned or abandoned. These included children with disability and children & young adults with terminal illness.



In the summer of 2000 following the worldwide publication of a documentary displaying the horrific conditions in institutions in Moldova, shown on BBC and RTE; 'Convoy to Moldova', a large contingent of Irish Volunteers travelled to work with these wonderful children. As a result of this an Irish doctor Suzanne O Connell set up the Irish charity ORM.



ORM began to work with the state run institution in Hincesti. ORM offers volunteer placements yearly throughout the months May-October in the Republic of Moldova specifically to work with children and young adults. The trip to Moldova starts by meeting a bunch of people who are strangers, at 1am in the morning of the flight to Chisinau, but to return as a close bunch of friends.

You stay on the grounds of an orphanage that is situated 3km from the town of Hincesti and 50Km from the capital city Chisinau. The Orphanage sits on the periphery of a very picturesque forest and is quite isolated from the surrounding villages and town.

Each day is very varied as you work with some of the 16 different groups of girls. The girls are split up in to groups according to the severity of their condition. A typical day

is from 9 am to 6 pm and includes taking part in child orientated activities that already exist in the orphanage. This includes school, cooking classes, sewing classes, art and dance, walking the children confined to wheelchairs, sensory activities for children with intellectual disabilities, music activities, art activities and wheelchair races.

You also have the opportunity to visit the baby orphanage in the capital which is also ran by ORM to help with the daily activities. The children just seemed to thrive with the attention they get from the volunteers. At times you feel like you're doing so little, like giving attention to a specific group of girls, maybe in a group or play situation, or visiting in isolation. They crave for touch, and attention and this they most certainly get from the Irish Volunteers. The joy you feel when you see a child being able to walk that couldn't walk the year before, or the smile on a child's face when they receive something as simple as a new t-shirt, makes the fundraising worthwhile.

Every year as you are leaving the children ask will you come back and of course you promise "I'll be back" so I guess that's why we keep going back

For two weeks of the year you really can make a difference and although I may have also 'given something back', I got so much more in return.

Aside from the girls in the orphanage, you can expect to

work with people who come from diverse fields and are some of the best and nicest people I have ever met.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone most sincerely for the donation I received both this year and in previous years for Outreach Moldova and also to all those who have supported my shoe-box appeal for the last two years. The money raised is hugely important to the lives of the children, as its goes towards their daily basic needs, and I am really grateful to you on their behalf. With falling numbers of volunteers and cooperate sponsorship down due to the recent downturn in our economy, your sponsorship is truly appreciated. All donations make a real difference to these children who have been transformed from sad, despondent children to happier, brighter children.

