

Newsletter from Romania, July 2009

Volunteer program "Just as precious!" is our last project that we finished this week. Twelve volunteers have been involved in this. It was a very diverse group: boys and girls, high school and university students, some were very dynamic, other very quiet. But in common they all had their great motivation to participate in this project. They had courage to sign up for a project and into an association of which they hardly knew anything about. They invested their time and money to be with and serve young kids with needs. It was clear from the beginning that none of these young people had any experience with volunteer work, teamwork, organising something, etc. But we never asked for that. We wanted young people open to learn. And that's what they did! They learned about how to work as a team, how to organise an activity, how to deal with a child that comes from a difficult home situation or how to talk to a child that can't say anything back.



We've been with the volunteers from January until June visiting two different houses: one for children in emergency situations and the other for children with severe mental disabilities. We went with half of the group of volunteers once every two weeks to one house and with the other half to the other house. All the volunteers attended both houses by rotation.

We did a lot of different things in the house with children with mental disabilities: colouring, gluing, dancing, playing outside, etc. We even organised two trips. One trip was to a biology museum where the children could see fish and stuffed animals; the other to the zoo. This time, we went with almost all children from the house by a big bus. We

were very surprised that a transportation company provided the bus to us for free. Wow! The children were very excited about leaving their institution! This doesn't happen very often and some of them hadn't seen cars, people on the street, buildings, etc. for a long time. The animals from the zoo were of course also a great attraction. The faces of the children showed clearly that they were enjoying it very much, even though they couldn't express this with words.



We worked a lot on teamwork with the children from the emergency home. We've tried to teach them something about how to relate to other children, how to loose and to win in an appropriate way and how to appreciate the people around them by playing different games and competitions. Most children still have to learn a lot about this, because they come from difficult family backgrounds.

Besides the activities in both houses, we also spent time training our volunteers. We started each activity by telling them what we were going to do, how we were going to do it and our expectations of them. And at the end of each activity we had a moment for feedback, where we talked about how they experienced it, their frustrations, questions, etc.

And we spent a whole Saturday with them. We got to know each other better through different games and questions. And part of the day we spent by talking about their identity and personality. We used the book by Max Lucado: *You are special!* It tells you that every person sticks stars for positive things (e.g. you are smart) and black dots for negative things (e.g. you are ugly) on other people. But in the end it doesn't matter what other people think, because it matters what our Creator thinks about us. The volunteers appreciated this day very much. They even asked for another one!

Last Saturday we had our closure meeting with them and we talked again about identity. This time we used a book by Gary Chapman: *The five love languages*. We want to challenge the volunteers to think about who they are, what's important in their life, what they want, etc. And, not in the last place, we want to teach them to respect themselves and the people around them.

We evaluate this project as very successful. And so do the people from the Child Protection Department and the directors of both houses. They were highly impressed about how serious and professional we organised the whole project. And they already asked us to continue in the coming year. This is a good sign, and we are thankful to God for this.