

# SHOEBOX NEWS

2012 EDITION



## Thank You!

Thank You for making Operation Christmas Child possible. It was another fantastic appeal, with nearly 1.1 million shoeboxes wrapped, packed and sent (both by hands and via computers!) to some of the neediest children living in 14 countries around the world.

This edition of Shoebox News is our way of saying thank you for being part of this Christmas miracle...

## A Shoebox And A Home

The Zeqiri family know perhaps more than most the truth that God can be our refuge and our fortress. When they arrived at Konik 2 - a refugee camp of about 300 inhabitants in Podgorica, Montenegro - the family had been traumatised by being separated from each other due to family problems.

Most of the inhabitants of the refugee camp do not see themselves as simply Roma. Instead, these refugees from Kosova call themselves 'Egyptian', and say they differ from the Roma who trace their roots back to India. Wherever they came from centuries ago, nowadays they live beside the municipal rubbish dump of Podgorica.

When the Zeqiri family arrived there, they had nothing much at all. The local church invited the father and some of his children to live in the one room house that is the church. Now his wife and some more children have been able to join him.

It seems a good arrangement: by simply 'occupying' the church, the family protects it from any vandalism. When services and meetings take place, they simply push the mattresses and bedding up against the wall. The family owns no furniture at all - just a few plates and some blankets and clothes.

Mrs Zeqiri is amazed that anyone would open their door to give her a home. It has made quite an impression on her. As for the shoeboxes that arrived in the week before Christmas, she was delighted that her 6-year old daughter Bleona would be given one: the little girl has no toys whatever.

To her delight, Bleona found just what she needed in her shoebox - a hat! Her old one is ripped and comes from the rubbish dump. But this new hat fitted her perfectly, and will help to keep her warm in the cold of a Montenegro winter. "I want to thank the person who sent me

this hat," she said. "I love stripes, and it has stripes! Thank you so much! Aren't I beautiful?!"

Her brother, Astrit, has been with his uncle for several months, and the mother has missed him very much. When she was told that the church leaders would save a shoebox for a child they had never even met, she burst into tears. At least, after years of homelessness and struggle, she feels that she has some friends and kindness around her.

The Zeqiri family is a wonderful example of how shoeboxes can play such a crucial part in building relationships with hurting people.

**The mission of Operation Christmas Child is to demonstrate God's love in a tangible way to needy children around the world, and together with the local church worldwide, to share the Good News of Jesus Christ.**

**The power of a simple gift**

# OCC In Numbers

To give you a glimpse of just what goes into making Operation Christmas Child (OCC) happen each year, here is a glance at the 2011 shoebox appeal by numbers:

- 1,089,018** shoeboxes sent out from the UK & Ireland to children overseas
- 500,000+** children and adults involved in making up gift-filled shoeboxes
- 16,184** churches, schools, workplaces and community groups involved
- 7,500+** overseas volunteers helping to distribute shoeboxes to children in-country
- 5,000+** UK volunteers helping to collect, prepare and send out shoeboxes
- 1,927** public places serving as Drop Off Points to collect shoeboxes
- 14** countries in which children will receive shoeboxes made up in 2011
- 1** child – what it's all about: each child who receives a shoebox is special and loved by God



## The Little House Of Joy

*Upon her return from a shoebox distribution trip to Belarus, we asked staff member Faith Spinks to recall a story from a trip that has stayed with her...*

Maria is an incredible woman who gives her life daily for her eleven adopted children and one child of her own. As we entered her tiny apartment, you could feel the love, joy and life in that little home.

Leena, aged 9 (pictured), is a quiet girl with cerebral palsy whose own family was not able to cope with her disability. As we gave out shoeboxes to these children there was so much joy in the room – each child excitedly showing the others what they had got and each of them genuinely showing an interest in what their siblings had received.

Leena opened her own box and enjoyed exploring her gifts but for her the real pleasure seemed to be in admiring her sisters' boxes and enjoying with them the treasures they had all received.



## Above And Beyond

Shoeboxes are all about those magic moments – not just for the children who receive the gifts, but also for the generous children who make them up here in the UK.

For William (aged 7) from Knutsford and Michelle (aged 16) from Glasgow, taking part in last year's shoebox appeal meant going above and beyond the call of duty.

Birthday boy William from Yorston Lodge Primary School in Knutsford, Cheshire, decided to ask his classmates not to bring any presents to his birthday party this year, but to bring a gift-filled shoebox instead. The result? 22 shoeboxes from his mates and quite a stir amongst fellow pupils at the school once they heard what he had done.

Paper-round girl Michelle from Mearns Castle High School on the outskirts of Glasgow earned around £400 over the course of a year delivering over 400 copies of 'The Glaswegian' every week. But instead of spending it on herself, she put it all towards the cost of making-up 30 shoeboxes and sending them out to children in need through Operation Christmas Child.



To William, Michelle and the thousands of other children who made sacrifices so that a child less fortunate than themselves could experience the joy of a shoebox gift, thank you – we hope it has left a mark on you too.

# The Car That Spoke To Me

You hear shoebox stories where you least expect them. This one happened to one of the volunteer team in Podgorica, Montenegro when he lived in northern Serbia, about 15 years ago.

It was then that a five year old lad called Sasha was taken to the little local Pentecostal church one day before Christmas. His parents were members of the church, and they had been told to bring their son along, because there would be a nice surprise for him. Sure enough, Sasha was given a shoebox. He has never forgotten it.

"It was the only present I got that year, as my parents were not wealthy. In fact, I have to say that that shoebox was the main source of toys for my entire childhood. My parents struggled to feed

and clothe us, and so toys were not a priority."

Years later Sasha fled Serbia, and ended up in Montenegro. Now about 20, he is helping distribute shoeboxes to the refugees living in the Konick 2 camp. Sasha knows from personal experience the difference a shoebox can make in the lives of these children, and for how long they will remember this totally unexpected kindness.

"I still remember most of the gifts in that box. There was this amazing little red and black car that spoke to me. The car said: 'Step on the gas, we gotta get out of here!' That made a huge impression on me at the time. I had that car for years and years - it finally fell apart from use."



The person who packed that box back in 1996 had no idea that that gift of love, shed into a young life, would work its magic for years and still be remembered with fond gratitude 15 years on. Back in 1996, Sasha never dreamed that one day, in a different country, he would be helping to distribute the boxes to other children in great personal need.

# The Shoebox Kids Of Liberia

These are the faces of the children of Lofa County in Liberia, West Africa. Faces that have known the horrible aftermath of civil war. Faces that have known the harsh realities of poverty.

They are also faces full of anticipation for the day when the shoeboxes will arrive – around 6,000 shoeboxes created online using our Shoebox World website.

The contrast between these gifts and what the children have right now couldn't be starker. For boys, a common toy is a 'car' engineered using discarded old oil cans, pulled around on a string. Girls like to play 'house' with some small sticks and rocks, making a little fire to cook rice over - a miniature version of what they see their mother do each day.

Never will these children have received a wrapped gift full of toys and education supplies. Nothing even close.

We wanted to tell you about just three of these children who will be receiving Shoebox World shoeboxes...



## Fatu

- 10 years old
- Loves going to school and enjoys the hot meal that she receives there every day!
- Parents are subsistence farmers, with an average income of \$15USD per month
- When she grows up she wants to be a teacher



## Tamba

- 11 years old
- Attends the community school and is proud that he can spell his own name (something 60% of the population cannot do)
- Loves to play football and is a member of the community's junior team
- Often helps his parents on the farm - drawing water, brushing the fields and cutting down trees
- He wants to be a carpenter when he grows up

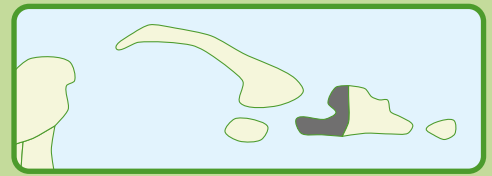
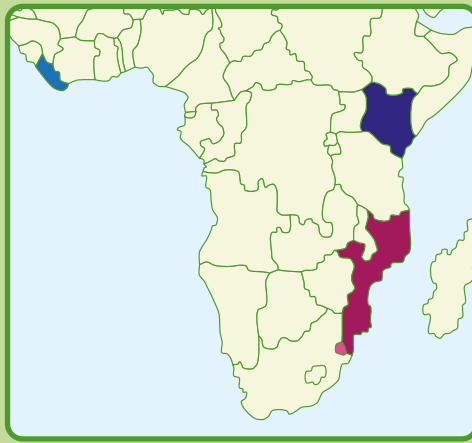
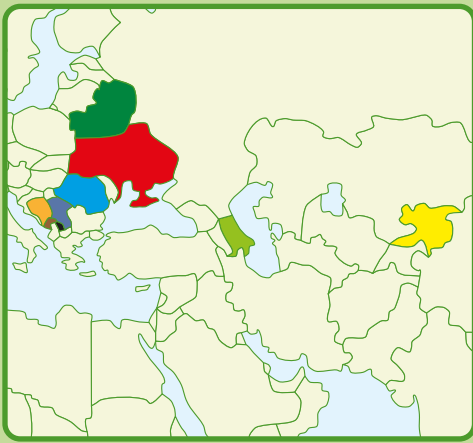


## Nessie

- 5 years old
- She has 3 brothers and 2 sisters
- She can go with her mum to the rice farm, but she is too young to help out
- She loves to play house with her friends

To impact the life of a child like Nessie, Tamba or Fatu with an online shoebox from Shoebox World, simply visit [www.operationchristmaschild.org.uk/shoeboxworld](http://www.operationchristmaschild.org.uk/shoeboxworld).

The power of a simple gift



- |   |            |   |            |
|---|------------|---|------------|
|  | Azerbaijan |  | Liberia    |
|  | Belarus    |  | Montenegro |
|  | Bosnia     |  | Mozambique |
|  | Haiti      |  | Romania    |
|  | Kenya      |  | Serbia     |
|  | Kosova     |  | Swaziland  |
|  | Kyrgyzstan |  | Ukraine    |



## Love From Far Away

The dark, damp little room within the disused railway container says it all: poverty lives here. Recently, when a leak in the roof so rotted the floor beneath that the sink fell through, the Dad had to haul it back into the room and wedge it in place as best he could.

In the years since Esmé and Resye moved to Pristina - the capital of Kosova - with their parents, their father has fallen ill, and now cannot work. Indeed, he looks as if he can barely stand up. The social aid kept them alive, but only just. They begged for some help, and the local church responded. This has made a big impression on the family.

The mother greets us at the door to the container with simple dignity and warmth. "Come in, come in," she says, "you are so welcome." We crowd into the dark little room. "The shoeboxes will mean so much to my children," she confides. "We cannot give them anything, even though we love them so much."

She looks down on her children who are wide-eyed, cautiously exploring their shoeboxes. "You have brought us love from far away. People in our own country hate and despise us, but you do not. That is so strange to me. Thank you to whoever it was in the UK who did this for my children. I will never forget you."

## Reasons To Pray And Praise

### Praise

- Nearly 1.1 million children will be reminded that God loves them and someone in the UK cares about them.
- Hundreds of local churches in 14 countries will have the opportunity to bless a child and build a relationship with them and their families through these shoeboxes.
- Around 400,000 adults and children in the UK have discovered the truth of Acts 20:35 - "It is more blessed to give than to receive"

### Pray

- That each child receiving a shoebox will know the love of God at that moment and be able to recapture

some of their childhood through the gifts they've received

- That the shoebox will be just the beginning of the local church volunteers helping each family with their other needs - material, emotional and spiritual
- That children taking part in The Greatest Journey will discover the greatest gift of all - Jesus Christ - and how they can have a relationship with Him

**Finally...if you have an idea of how Operation Christmas Child can be made even better, then why not email it to us at [info@samaritans-purse.org.uk](mailto:info@samaritans-purse.org.uk)**



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