

## Operation Christmas Child Thousands of miles, Millions of smiles



**Over 7,000 schools. Nearly 5,000 churches. Several thousand volunteers, and hundreds of warehouses and drop-off points.**

Because of you, the 2008 Operation Christmas Child campaign was made not only possible, but also hugely successful once again.

With your help we were able to deliver over 1.2 million gift filled shoe boxes to needy children in 13 countries throughout Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Africa.

These timely shoe box gifts remind these children that they are valuable and have not been forgotten. They also serve as a reminder that Christmas is a time when, all over the world, people celebrate the birth of Jesus - the greatest 'gift' of all.

As a way of saying thank you for putting smiles on the faces of children not used to receiving presents, the next six pages are devoted to telling stories of how a simple shoe box gift has brought great joy into the life of such a child.

For everyone who prayed, bought, packed, collected, sorted, distributed, drove, delivered and did who knows what else to make Operation Christmas Child happen, these stories are our way of saying thank you...

**Order your 2009 resources and read more stories at [www.operationchristmaschild.org.uk](http://www.operationchristmaschild.org.uk)**



### Top of the class

11 year old Sheilla lives with her younger brother, mother and father in a steel storage container in Pristina, Kosova. The government provided these 'homes' in 1999 for people displaced by the war. They are very cold in the winter and very hot in the summer and many people living there are ill, including Sheilla's father. Despite their difficult circumstances, both children are able to go to school. Sheilla is a star pupil and hopes to be an English teacher when she grows up. She was thrilled to receive a notepad and pens to help her practise her writing.

**By Claire Farley**

### Stars in her eyes



Merita, aged two, was running and jumping around, eager to receive a shoe box at the Roma camp in Bar, Montenegro.

Merita lives with her mum and older sister, Sylvia, on the edge of a rubbish tip. The girls aren't allowed to go to school and never receive presents, so today was a special day indeed!

**"Thank you very much for sending presents. Thank you for remembering us"**

Her mother helped Merita open the box as she excitedly hopped up and down. Merita is often found playing ball games with the other children living on the camp, so she was especially pleased to receive a ball of her own and some sunglasses, which she wore proudly from that point on. Sylvia loved her scarf and smiled, saying: "Thank you very much for sending presents. Thank you for remembering us".

**By Claire Farley**



## Hoping for the best

Arbor's mother watched as the shoe box distribution moved gradually closer to her son's bed in the children's ward of Pristina Hospital in Kosova. Her 3-year old son had been admitted to the hospital after coming down with a lung infection earlier in the week.

"The doctors here are doing a good job, but life is difficult for us," she says, explaining how each injection for Arbor costs one sixth of their monthly income. "Right now, my husband earns just enough from washing cars. But I hope there will be a better job for him and a better life for us soon."

Arbor's face lit up as he finally received his shoe box. Joy can be hard to find in these conditions, but as Arbor took each item out of the box and carefully inspected it, his smile grew bigger. His mother watched as her son savoured each moment, then spotted a winter hat and put it on his head. "You look handsome", she told him, smiling. He smiled back and said he was very happy to receive these gifts, especially the hat and toothbrushes!

The atmosphere in the children's ward changed as shoe boxes were given out. Families with worried faces began to celebrate together despite their circumstances, thanking the volunteers from the church for their kindness.

**Arbor was very happy with his gifts, especially the hat and toothbrushes!**

It was only one hospital ward, but it was a reminder that God is able to use Operation Christmas Child and each shoe box gift to bring light to the people of Kosova – people who have known much darkness in recent years.

## Diary of a shoe box distributor

22-year old Claire Beament from London kept a diary during her trip distributing shoe boxes to children in Serbia. She shares with the Good Guide some of the standout moments for a first-time shoe box distributor...



**Day 1**  
Our first distribution was to a Roma community. The first little boy I opened a shoe box with I will never forget. The look on his face when he saw inside was amazing; I can't fully describe it. It made tears prick in my eyes. I can honestly say that I had never seen a child look so happy before.

Our final distribution of the day was to a Roma community who lived under a flyover. This is the distribution that most springs to mind when anyone asks me about my trip. It was unbelievable, like an African shanty town.

There was a baby girl – too young to get a box - who was with her dad waiting for a sibling to return with a box. She just kept crying and crying. I went over to her with a cuddly toy sheep I had in my pocket and as soon as she saw the sheep, she stopped crying. That really upset me. That something so simple to us meant so much to them.

**Day 2**  
When we arrived at the home for disabled children, they were so excited they applauded us as we entered and applauded at any given opportunity.



I felt almost embarrassed. They were treating us like royalty and putting us on a pedestal, when I am just a 'normal' person lucky enough to get the opportunity to come to Serbia and meet these children. I am no more important or special than they are.

**Day 3**  
During the distribution at a school for disabled children, I spent a long time chatting to Melissa – a 14-year old girl who received a shoe box. As we went through the contents of her box she pulled out a cuddly toy leopard back pack. I commented it was

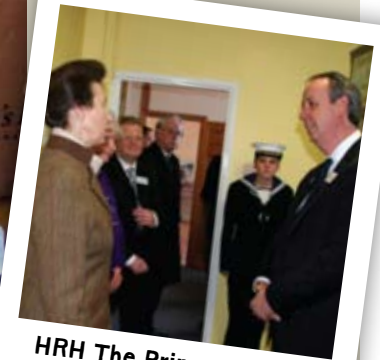
lovely and she agreed with me and said it was for her two-year old sister. This really touched me. To think that people with so little are so generous with what they do have was really humbling.

**Day 4**  
We spoke to one lady who lived in a small apartment in a refugee home with her seven children. She told us this was the seventh place she had lived in since leaving Kosova. She started to get very upset, but when asked what impact the shoe boxes had on her and her family, her whole face lit up. She said it made

her children so happy as she would not be able to give them gifts like this herself.

**Final thoughts...**  
This experience has really shown me (although it might sound a bit cheesy) that something small can make a big difference. Through the shoe boxes, doors are opened for Samaritan's Purse partners to help these people in other ways in their lives. The shoe boxes are only a simple, small gift to us, but they give a child – a family - a message of hope and some happiness for a while.

## Royal shoe box visit



HRH The Princess Royal with Simon Barrington

The 2008 OCC campaign received a touch of royalty when HRH The Princess Royal paid a visit to staff and volunteers working at the warehouse in Weston-super-Mare.

During her visit, Princess Anne watched volunteers preparing shoe boxes ahead of a delivery to Belarus and spoke with Executive Director Simon Barrington about the work of Samaritan's Purse.

The visit was in recognition of the voluntary efforts of the Nightingale family who, for the past three years, has generously donated units at both their home and office storage company to help make Operation Christmas Child a big hit in the local area.