



Magical events deliver toys to children

by Maya Momcilovic-Jordan, tour organiser

The Serbian Council of Great Britain devoted the summer of 2006 to the children of Serbia. Children are our future and we hope that through our efforts this summer the futures of some of the most impoverished children will be a little brighter.

The charity tour Magic & Toys for Serbia, supported by the Serbian Council, started as an idea of Andy, 'AJ', magician/entertainer for children and adults. His idea was the first stone that grew over the summer into a mosaic of love, happiness and joy.

Toys were collected in the months before the tour from many areas of England. From Kent,

St Katherine's School in Snodland, Holmewood House in Tunbridge Wells, Speldhurst CE School and Cuxton Infants School all contributed. Holy Trinity CE School in Wimbledon also organised a toy collection. The Serbian Orthodox Church of St John in Halifax organised a day of fun for children and filled our van up to the roof with toys. We were kindly supported by Melita and Miroslav Veselinovic at the Hotel Ravna Gora, London, who provided us with a collection point for the toys.

Branco Stoysin, composer and guitarist donated a contribution from the sales of his latest album, and many other individuals made donations to the

continued overleaf



project, as well as the Embassy of the Republic of Serbia. We are extremely grateful to all donors; whether you sent money or a small cuddly bear, a play kitchen or a bike, all contributions were most welcome. In total we collected over a ton of toys and £1,405.

We were very fortunate to attract the attentions of Phil Shorthouse, who is the regional manager of Blythswood Care, a charity based in Rochester. He knocked on our door one night and offered to transport the toys for us to the Red Cross camp at Kraljevo, Serbia, free of charge.

Although my husband, Andy, and I had visited Belgrade many times before, at the start of this tour we were very excited - almost like children ourselves.

It felt the same when we stepped into the first orphanage. Curious children approached us, held our hands and touched our clothes. They were full of questions and wanted to help and get involved as much as possible.

In places like hospitals and centres for ill children the atmosphere was quieter and the children were more shy and reserved. The most touching visits were to a centre for autistic children and a refugee camp.

We visited 12 places in Serbia altogether, including four orphanages (Jovan Jovanovic Zmaj, Mose Pijade, Zvecanska in Belgrade



and Dr Milorad Pavlovic's Children's Village in Sremska Kamenica), two children's hospitals in Belgrade - the Institute for Mother and Child and the Children's Clinic in Tirosova, a centre for mentally handicapped children in Kraljevo and a centre for children suffering from muscular dystrophy, as well as a centre for abused children in Novi Sad. We also visited a centre for autistic children in Belgrade, a refugee camp in Mataruska Banja and a nursery - Djura Jaksic - in Srpska Crnja.

Toys reached more than 1,000 children

At each location we put on a magic show and presented each child individually with toys, as well as giving larger collections of toys to institutions.

Toys have reached more than 1,000 children. The bigger places we visited gave us the opportunity to have a disco party afterwards, whilst smaller places enjoyed face painting and balloon modelling.

The tour was very tiring but extremely rewarding. Once we entered the world of children in need it was impossible to forget it. The memories of the children's faces have become part of us and keep returning.

We are most grateful to everyone who helped us with the tour, for their kindness and generosity, and we hope that together we have made the lives of those children a little brighter.

Annual General Meeting

by Aleks Simic

The General Committee of the Serbian Council has set the time and date for the next AGM to be Sunday, 11 February 2007. The venue will be the Polish Centre in Hammersmith. The AGM this year will be followed by presentations of recent projects and future events, in order to try to fully appraise the range of activities of the members and friends of the Serbian Council.

We trust that all attending will stay on after the formal parts of the afternoon for more informal chats and mingling.

A New Team for 2007

by Aleks Simic

The General Committee of the Serbian Council has recognised that the scope of work undertaken by the Council is limited by the amount of time that the General Committee members can dedicate to it. For 2007, therefore, the Council has decided to promote a variety of sub-committees which it has set so that supporters of the Serbian Council can join in and make a direct contribution to the Council's work.

If you have the time and inclination perhaps you would consider putting your name forward for participation in one of the following sub-committees.

- **The Annual Ball Sub-Committee**

If you have experience of organising this type of fundraising activity please consider getting in touch.

- **The Membership Sub-Committee**

One of the main tasks will be to expand our existing database to promote additional membership and interest in the Council. We need people with computer skills and time.

- **Communications Sub-Committee**

The General Committee of the Serbian Council has deliberated long and hard about the potential of setting up a sub-committee to monitor media coverage of Serb-related news and to respond in the name of British-based Serbs as required. This project would need to be ongoing with strong 'rules of engagement'. If you would be interested in contributing to such a project please get in touch and we can take the matter further.

Informator

by Aleks Simic

The Informator is a notice board for Serb-related events, compiled monthly by the Serbian Council and issued to over 1,500 Serbs by e-mail. The idea was presented to the General Committee by Marina Kovacevic at the first meeting of the current term and was implemented almost straight away. The response from receivers has been very good. Marina, who co-ordinates the project, is keen that we get better coverage of Serb-related events across the country and would like to hear from contributors - whether you want to let her know about one-off events or make regular contributions from your part of the country.

Please get in touch also if you wish to receive your own monthly e-mail of events for the Serb calendar. Please e-mail Marina at info@serbiancouncil.org.uk

S C Website

by Aleks Simic

The Serbian Council of Great Britain launched its website, www.serbiancouncil.org.uk, back in October 2005, so the site has been running for over a year now. We are pleased to report that the site is reasonably well visited, and we have managed to update it on a regular basis, as and when additional information becomes available. The site is extensive, however, and we are aware that elements of it require more regular attention and freshening up. If anybody feels able to help on the editorial side please get in touch.

The site has many useful links to other Serb-related organisations and has provided us with a steady flow of interesting comments and requests.

Vacancy

by Aleks Simic

The General Committee of the Serbian Council of Great Britain has resolved to adopt the services of an administrative assistant and would be pleased to receive applications for the position. We anticipate a time commitment of approximately 20 hours per month. The position requires an excellent command of Serbian and English languages, computer literacy and good organisational skills. If you are interested, please apply in writing to The President of the Serbian Council of Great Britain, PO Box 42603, London, SW5 0WT, by 1 March 2007.

Nasa Srbija Summer School

by Natasha Kocsis

The Serbian Council of Great Britain and the Serbian Society joined together to send seven young children from the Serbian diaspora in the UK to attend a summer school organised by Nasa Srbija. Over 400 young Serbs from Serbia, America, Canada, Sweden and other countries came together in the Tara Mountain region for two fun-packed weeks of sporting, cultural and educational activities.

The initiative was led and co-ordinated by Gordana Miller, the Serbian Council and the Serbian Society. It aimed to support the laudable objectives of Nasa Srbija to enable young Serbs from the diaspora to meet with their Serbian counterparts, increase their understanding of each other and to bring a little bit of happiness into the lives of Serbian orphans, refugees and children from poor backgrounds. Nasa Srbija started the project a few years ago with full support from the Serbian government, the Church

and many humanitarian organisations that have provided financial assistance and in-kind help.

The Serbian Council provided a grant of £100 for each child attending from the UK. The visit was organised in line with guidelines from the UK Department for Education and Skills and Marko Ninkovic of the Serbian Council arranged and met the costs of fully insuring the group. Natasha Kocsis (Serbian Council) and Olga Gakovic (Serbian Society) accompanied the group, who were given free accommodation at the Hotel Slavija in Belgrade, on its way to and from the summer school thanks to the generosity of Mr Veselin Jovicevic, Managing Director of Hotel Slavija.

The visit went well and some are even planning a return journey in 2007. The Serbian Council hopes also to organise a similar visit to another part of Serbia in the summer of 2007.



Membership application form

I hereby confirm that I:

- 1 would like to be a member of the Serbian Council of Great Britain ('the Council')
- 2 support and am committed to the fulfilment of the objects of the Council (as set out in the Council's Constitution).
- 3 undertake to be bound by and act in accordance with, the said Constitution.

Name _____

Address _____

Home telephone _____ Work telephone _____

Mobile telephone _____ Fax _____

Home e-mail _____ Work e-mail _____

Signed _____ Dated _____

Standard membership £25. Pensioners and students £15. Please make cheques payable to **The Serbian Council of Great Britain** and return this form to **Aleks Simic, 30 Mill Street, Bedford MK40 3HD.**