

# *Viata: Re-Creational Outreach*

*August 2002*

*News from Dana and Brandi Bates in Lupeni, Romania*

We have finished the final week of the Viata Program's third summer in Romania, and alas we're coming up for air (after three weeks straight of rain!) to share some good news from our neck of the woods...before we head back to the mountains for real (see below for our professional development course in Retezat National Park ). We hope this finds you and yours well, enjoying the long summer days, surviving the heat, and securing some "down" time with your family and friends. Blessings to you and thank you for being part of Viata's *re-creational* work in the Jiu Valley. We couldn't succeed without your partnership. And slowly...piece by piece, habit by habit, value by value, program by program, and kid by kid...indeed we *are* engaging in the work of *re-creation!*

## *Best Staff Ever*

Perhaps our greatest satisfaction is watching our Romanian staff grow in quality and maturity. We're grateful for our best group of leaders yet: seven in their third season with Viata, four second-yearers, and ten newcomers, (as well as five Americans). Of our new leaders, six are university students from Bucharest and Timisoara, two of whom study psychology and are instrumental in the twice-weekly proctoring of our new *performance metrics survey*, developed by Cay Anderson Hanley, Ph.D.

## *Viata Closing Ceremony*

Every year we try and "*Kaizen*" (continuously improve) our Viata Program. So this year, every Friday, after participating in an ecological service project (this is the participants' payment for the program, paying in sweat rather than money), the groups gather for a closing ceremony. They perform dramas telling of lessons learned during the week, sing songs, and give round after round of applause to show their appreciation for their leaders. And the new, "*kaizened*" part is that at the conclusion each participant receives a laminated copy of the Viata Program Covenant as well as a bright yellow covenant bracelet. The idea is that when they meet each other in town, their common yellow bracelets will remind and reinforce the common goals stated in the covenant and printed below. We tell them that just as a man and wife commit to mutual respect and other values for a happy marriage, we are asking them to commit to the following for the betterment of our communal life:

## *A New Generation Makes a New Commitment*

*I want to participate in **continuous improvement.***

**I commit:**

- ✓ To respect other people, nature, etc.
- ✓ To assume responsibility for myself and not blame others.
- ✓ To be trustworthy.
- ✓ To keep the **Golden Rule**: "Don't do to others what you don't want done to you." (and the inverse..."Do unto others...")

- ✓ To not be indifferent.
- ✓ To not lie in order to protect or improve my image.
- ✓ To think before I act.
- ✓ To be open to constructive criticism and feedback.
- ✓ To not lie, steal, or cheat.
- ✓ To actively participate in positive change.

These values are relevant to fighting the Post-Communist legacy here, which for more than a generation rewarded apathy, deception, and incompetence--the result being that trusting, respectful relationships are rendered difficult.

### *Stories of Transformation*

- ❖ Last week, in addition to our weekly group of 12 young people from one of our county orphanages, we had another group of young people come from Petrosani with their Caritas (Catholic Church Humanitarian Arm) social worker, Nora Dubyk. As Nora shared with us, most of her kids come from troubled homes, severe poverty, and insurmountable hardships. **Ana** has 10 siblings and lives in conditions most would consider unlivable. At 13 she resembles an old woman who has seen too much heartache. She walks through life with her head bowed, her mouth pulled down, her eyes dim and her spirit huddled out of reach. She is used to very miniscule attention, very little loving. Sunday afternoon found her suddenly integrated into a group of 10 others her age, holding out their hands to her in game-playing, learning her name. Suddenly she had the attention of four adult leaders, trying to meet her eyes, asking her questions about herself, desiring her opinion, laying a comforting hand on her shoulder. It was too much for her. She broke down crying, there in her group on the first afternoon while playing a light-hearted name game. She just started crying. Nora was there to comfort her. When I asked Nora why Ana was crying she said, “Because she’s not used to so much attention and care.”
- ❖ Our rock climbing instructor, Eci, told a similar story two days later. Loredana, 14, one of the young girls from the orphanage, was similarly out of emotional reach. From the first moment at camp, she dared not make eye contact with anyone. During Eci’s talk with her group before the rock climb her eyes stayed characteristically glued to her shoes, ***her personality shackled and shriveled through years of fear***. He began to call her by name, to gently beckon her back to the circle, prodding her to join them in the activity. After a long while she finally melted a little, looked at him and released a smile. She ended up doing a rock climb, with the cheers of her group lifting her upwards, her smile boldly held out for all to see. And amazingly, it continued non-stop through the week, becoming a permanent fixture on her face!

***“You must know that there is nothing higher, or stronger, or sounder, or more useful afterwards in life, than some good memory, especially a memory from childhood... You hear a lot about education, yet some such beautiful, sacred memory, preserved from***

*childhood, is perhaps the best education...And even if only one good memory remains with us in our hearts, that alone may serve some day for our salvation.” (The Brothers Karamazov, p. 774)*

**You, our supporters (in all sorts of ways), are part of this.**

## Cultivating these Memories through...



Our follow-up program (*Kaizen*, Japanese for “continuous improvement”—Dana was born in Japan ☺) is “kaizenizing” all the time. *Kaizen* is both a process, and a product—a method and a club. Though small now, *Kaizen* is positioned for tremendous growth. We hope to have in the next year 5 *Kaizen* clubs. ***Kaizen creatively combines fun, learning, and service to continuously improve both self and society.*** We are in the process of getting *Kaizen* clubs approved as extra-curricular programs in the public schools. It will also include a day center through which we will integrate those who have dropped out of school, or are in desperate socio-economic conditions, and are on their way to being “street kids”.

### ***Kaizen recently engaged in a historic service project...***

Part and parcel of the *Kaizen* club is that every month a fun activity is performed (ropes course, or excursion, etc.), as well as a community service project. Last week, 28 youth pulled out of a river the equivalent of 3 dump trucks worth of trash. They worked for 9 hours straight...did it on a volunteer basis, and began to internalize the benefits of service and the win-win view of life! If we can get more of these groups started...

### **Wilderness Education Association Course**

On August 21<sup>st</sup>, representatives from the University of Timisoara, the Salvamonts, our NGO, and the Retezat National Park Authority embarked on a 21 day professional development course hosted by our non-profit here in Romania (New Horizons). Trainers from the Wilderness Education Association are volunteering their time to bring to bear the best practices of wilderness education, servant leadership, and sound judgment on all of our organizations. This training is linked with our belief in the power of adventure education to transform lives.

### **Published in *Zip Lines*...**

We had an article “*Adventures in Philanthropy*” published in the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of the leading journal for adventure education, *Zip Lines*. The article is about the relevance of adventure education for the needs of post-communist cultures. Send us an email if you would like a copy.

### **Rotary Club International...**

A group of Rotarians is coming in October for a site visit. We are hoping to 1) establish a local Rotary Chapter 2) investigate possibilities for the day/Kaizen center for youth leadership and development and 3) explore possibilities for donations such as medical equipment and even a fire truck (you should see what they drive:). Rotary international has a wonderful motto that overlaps precisely with our mission: “**Service above Self: He profits most who serves best.**”

**Thanks again for your support for the youth of Romania.** A special thanks to our faithful monthly contributors and to the SG Foundation, Confidence for Kids in Bucharest, and the Thomas Foundation. Let us all remember the words of the one who said, “*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*”

### ***An Illustration: Which creates community? Respect given or respect received?***

“Respect me and *then* I’ll respect you.” This is the *ethic* of many. Though “good”, it is not good enough. A couple of Saturdays ago Dana was coming up the stairs in our apartment building and as he passed through the crowd waiting to register for the program, he was met by suspicious stares, glares, frowns and furrowed brows. This puzzled him because he knew that they knew that he was the director of this free-of-charge program they were there to sign up their very own kids for! A little more friendliness, and less suspicion, would have seemed appropriate. He had to pass through the crowd again and this time he decided, despite their gruff stares, to warmly welcome the moms and offer his hand to the dads. The faces relaxed and hands were extended. The third time he passed through, it was a different crowd...smiles, friendly nods, “saluts”. The beginnings of community were created.

The Viata and Kaizen Programs are teaching young people that if you wait for someone else to respect you first, nothing will happen. You’re stuck in a standoff of mutual suspicion. Those who respect first are sometimes rejected and mocked, but often are also given respect in return, and begin to make positive change possible. There is no other way--“*Nobis est - It’s up to us*”—but to have the moral courage to take the first step and break down the negative spirals of suspicion that tear life and community apart at the seams. There is no other way but to experientially realize that the only life worth living is one of integrity and honesty. There is no other way to better our societies than to live such lives of integrity that we break down the walls of suspicion and create bridges of trust and cooperation--beyond immediate family members. Only when the values of honesty and integrity that make trust possible are internalized and consistently acted upon—then and only then can we begin to live lives of dignity and community and even prosperity that we all know deep down is both the right, and responsibility of all of God’s creatures.