

# Kosovo, October 2003

by Bev Gadstone

At the end of last year and as part of the winterisation plan for Kosovo, Hope and Aid Direct took another convoy, to Kosovo. The convoy comprised 1 x 38 tonner and 6 x 7½ tonners. Thus carrying 50 tonnes of aid at an estimated retail value of up to £2.5 million. The 38 tonner was courtesy of Ford Motor Co, Dagenham complete with Hope and Aid Direct personalised curtain sides bearing the logo. Hope and Aid Direct volunteers funded, filled, and drove all the 7½ tonners. During the week, Hope and Aid Direct gave help to 600 families, a few local institutions and service providers such as hospitals, dentists and clinics.

The contents of the lorries, which was all donated, included: food, blankets, bedding, wheelchairs, hospital equipment, shoes, clothing, sanitary, hygiene and toiletry items, toys, and disposable nappies, bicycles, uniforms, rotary 'Aqua' boxes and Rotary 'Emergency' boxes, school equipment, two dental surgeries, and much more besides.

## Our objectives

To distribute material aid to Internally Displaced People (IDPs), refugees, and extremely vulnerable individuals (EVIs), and also to help local service projects and institutions, including: Hospitals, orphanages, dentists and the first Kosovo 'mixed' prison in Lipjan.

Hope and Aid Direct gives all its aid direct to the people and communities. Some of these people live in 'collective centres', which are typically requisitioned buildings such as disused schools, council buildings, or even theatres with the seats ripped out, often with broken windows, no heating, and very poor toilet facilities. The people, who live in these centres and have to fend entirely for themselves, are the 'forgotten ones' who, in many cases, fled their homes during the conflict that assaulted Bosnia and Croatia.

Hope and Aid Direct also deliver equipment directly to institutions, thus helping to reinstate them, and facilitating the provision by them of a better service for their local communities.

## Our destination

After discussions and preparations with UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief) and UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees) those organisations again agreed to support and facilitate the Hope and Aid Direct convoy which would in turn support an extensive vulnerable caseload comprising refugees and IDPs (Albanian, Serb, Bonsiak, Roma and Ashkalijia).

The wish lists and distribution lists were drawn up by UMCOR, UNHCR, GOAL and Balkan Sunflowers, (to whom we also delivered 5 very large boxes of aid) and with interpreters and on the ground planning, distributions were made to all beneficiaries on the list

Hope and Aid Direct visited families in the following regions: Fushe Kosovë/K. Polje, Mitrovica, Lipjan, Prishtina, Obilic, Skenderaj, Vushtrri, Obiliq, Ferizaj, Vitia, Gjilan, Novoberd, Shterpce, Viti, Mobila, Gornji Livoc, Binac, Cernica, Kamenica and Skenderaj.

## The journey

After four consecutive days of driving across Europe in convoy with mobile catnaps between driver changes, Hope and Aid Direct's convoy arrived in the early hours of Tuesday morning at the Raca border, Kosovo. After a very long delay we crossed into Kosovo and had a few hours sleep before clearing customs the next day. This was the second time the convoy had to clear Customs, the first being in Nis, Serbia.

The team then set to work on unloading the goods from each of the lorries into a warehouse, which was loaned to us free of charge for seven days, by a local enterprise, just on the outskirts of Pristina (solely for the purpose of sorting the aid to be distributed each day).

The first impressions of Kosovo were to deceive us by comparison to what we would all experience over the next week. In Pristina, they had traffic lights (although they don't work), a few more road signs, and dustbins, and more houses were being constructed on the outskirts of the town.

## Distribution of aid

The experiences below represent those of just one of our teams during our six days in Kosovo:

### Mogila School

Mogila is a mixed village of both Albanians and Serbs. The school was built by USAID and looked amazing from the outside. First impression was 'why would they need aid'... but on entering the building it was clear to see. The building, which has been erected 6 months, had no furniture; it was just an empty shell, as seen so often in the Balkans. The municipality and local community had been incapable, through complete lack of resources or funding, to make any attempt at getting the school operationa

Hope and Aid Direct were able to start to rectify this by delivering school equipment collected in the UK. As we unloaded during heavy downpours of rain and on rough terrain, the locals (both adults and children) came to watch and thanked us – desks, chairs, blackboards, stationery and an organ, which delighted the music teacher enormously. They had never had an organ/piano in the village before.



### Donja Budriga

On the same day we visited Budriga village in Gjlane, where we met 31 families who had had their homes burnt down during the war. These families consisting of 116 people were Albanian and their houses had been torched during the recent conflict, they sought refuge in the hills, before seeking IDP (internally displaced persons) status in Donja Budriga, living in other people's houses. In the community centre, where we made our distribution, they had photographs on the wall of all their houses post the conflict .

### Skenderaj

We visited a Dental Surgery that had two dentists and minimal equipment. Staggeringly, they cater for 72,000 people in 58 villages, (although a lot of people do not visit the dentist because they live in rural areas with no access/transport). We provided them with all the necessary equipment for another complete dental surgery, and this will help enormously with their needs.

### Mitrovica

Since 1999 the town has been divided along the Ibar River. To the south, the population is predominantly Kosovo Albanian (fewer than 20 Kosovo Serbs remain, living under 24 hour KFOR protection). The north of the town is now home to approximately 15,000 Kosovo Serbs. Lack of security and non-freedom of movement is a major obstacle to daily life notoriously bad and here the average length of time that it stays on is for 30 minutes, and then it goes off for unlimited time spans. They have no generators; so if electricity fails during operations, it can be catastrophic.



## Shtime

We once again visited the mental institution in Shtime (the only mental institution in Kosovo). The municipality consists of 26 villages and lies 30 km south of Pristina. In 1998 there was heavy fighting here and the clients of the mental institution were very much affected by the conflict which raged outside the gates. The patients are of mixed ethnic backgrounds.

The buildings at Shtime have dramatically improved since our last visit a year ago, thanks to a huge grant from the Dutch Government, and now the patients are living in much better conditions.

We again made a special visit to Burim, a youngster, whom we were asked to visit by a gentleman in the UK, two year ago. This supporter had read about him during the Kosovo conflict and had been trying since then to reach an organisation that knew him.

Burim has a very sad history and background, having lost both legs as a child in what seemingly was not an accident! For whatever reason, he was admitted to the mental home after it happened, and has been there ever since. At the time of our last visit he was being fitted with prosthetic limbs, but unfortunately these no longer fit him as he has grown and he is now once again confined to his wheelchair



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## **Thank You!**

Hope and Aid Direct would like to thank everyone who has donated goods, time, funding, transport and any other help towards this trip, and for helping us to make a difference for those we reached.

In particular we would like to thank Frank & Tig at Ford Motor Co, Shermond Surgical Supply Limited, Boots the Chemist, Brantano, Jack, Tim and everyone at Tools with a Mission, Audrey and her fantastic knitters at Teddies for Tragedies, David Beynon, David Swan and their team, Rosemary Toye, Sally & the Latham's, Sainsbury's, Alan and Adam Pudney at the farm, Alan Dinsdale and everyone at PKM Studios, Linda, & Terri at Cotton Fresh, our family and friends and so many others too numerous to mention, for their continued support.

## **Contact Details for the South East\***

If you would like further information about Hope and Aid Direct, please contact your local volunteers:

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***\*If you live in another area and know of anyone that would be interested in helping, please contact Charles and he can direct you to your nearest based volunteer.***