

NEWS

VICTOR EATS WELL EVERY DAY

story on page 3





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NEW KITCHEN FOR CHILDREN'S CARE HOME IN KENYA

Emily and her co-workers prepare meals for 18 children at the Kware Care Centre on the outskirts of Nairobi, Kenya - twice a day on school days and three times on Saturdays and Sundays.

Their task has been made a lot easier by a new kitchen and food store, specially designed and built from two steel shipping containers and funded by your gifts to Blythswood.

Emily used to prepare vegetables outside, crouched over a peeling bucket. Now she stands at a spacious worktop. There is a double sink with running water. There is an extractor fan, two large gas burners and an oven - something they didn't have before. And the secure, steel

construction guarantees an environment that is rat-proof and easy to keep clean.

The Kware Care Centre is run by Blythswood's partner organisation Pamoja. Charity trustee Sheena Griffin says, "We are so excited to have this new kitchen."



Victor is one of 18 young people to benefit from the new kitchen at Kware Care Centre

BEACON CENTRE 2 A PLACE OF HOPE AND SAFETY

Six-year-old Asraf is one of more than 60 children to benefit from after-school tuition and care at Beacon Centre 2, run by Safe Harbour, in Navi Mumbai, with support from Blythswood.

The nutritious meals, quality education and moral guidance available there are life-savers for Asraf and for his sister Sabina, who is just a year older. They're too young to remember their father, who died of COVID. Their mother works long hours as a tailor to support her children. For children like them, Beacon Centre 2 is a place of hope and safety.

Life in the slum is tough - and can be dangerous. Asraf fell from a height and suffered a life-threatening injury to his belly. Thanks to the swift response of the Beacon Centre team, he was quickly admitted to a good hospital where he received the urgent surgery and medical care he needed.

"His mother has been very thankful for the action taken by our team," says Sam Vadavana, who oversees Safe Harbour. "She says we saved her child's life."



Asraf landed in hospital when he suffered an injury



Beacon Centre 2 provides over 60 children with a cooked meal, after-school tuition and care

UKRAINE: SUPPORT FOR FAMILY IN FORCED RELOCATION

Elizabeth is a firefighter! At nine years old, she may be a bit young to do the job for real but at least she can try on the helmet during a children's club visit to a museum. The little girl's life was turned upside down two years ago when her father's place of work went up in flames following a Russian missile strike on the city of Sumy. When his job was moved to Ternopil, more than 500 miles away, the family had to rebuild their lives all over again.

They didn't know anybody in their new city but projects run by Light of Reformation, with support from Blythswood, have helped Elizabeth and her mother adjust to life there. At first, the family received humanitarian assistance in the form of a food package. Elizabeth started attending the children's club where she has been able to make new friends - especially important as she continued classes online with her school in Sumy.

Women's meetings helped her mother, Oksana, to build a new social circle. Psychological support helped her understand the emotions and inner tension caused by forced relocation and uncertainty about the future.

She says: "I came out of curiosity, but after the first meeting I realised how valuable this experience was. In a small group you build a real circle of trust where you can be sincere and receive support."

Elizabeth has made new friends at the children's club run by Light of Reformation





Your support helps Liudmyla focus on the development of her son

HELP IN TIME OF WAR FOR FAMILIES WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Caring for a child with special needs is always demanding. Doing so under war-time conditions is an extra challenge. Dmytryk was scarcely a toddler when the family had to evacuate their home in Irpin, Ukraine, because of the Russian invasion. As soon as the city was liberated, they returned to rebuild their lives.

Now six, Dmytryk was diagnosed with cerebral palsy at birth. His parents are continuously focussed on his health and development, doing everything they can to provide him with the best care and opportunities. His mother, Liudmyla, heard about the support offered by Serve Now from a friend who is also raising a

child with a disability.

“Liudmyla reached out to us,” says Serve Now leader Tanya Shpygunova. “We were able to provide her family with a food package and with a voucher worth 1,000 UAH [about £17] thanks to Blythswood’s support.”

“For families like this who already face medical and caregiving expenses, the economic consequences of the war create additional pressure. Help with essential food allows the family to redirect limited resources towards their child’s care and development. Liudmyla was so grateful for your support.”

A BURDEN SHARED IN BURDIEHOUSE

Cancer has turned *Liam’s life upside down. Surgery followed by multiple rounds of treatment has left him unable to work. And nausea and weakness make it difficult to look after the two children for whom he is the sole carer.

For a single parent in this situation, Southeast Edinburgh Foodbank has been a lifeline. “Liam always takes the opportunity to sit down and talk with our volunteers,” says foodbank manager Jodie Hope. “We’ve been able to support him through his illness, operations and treatment, and also through family bereavements and his day-to-day struggles.”

Liam was referred to the foodbank by his housing association. For each referral, clients receive non-perishable food sufficient to feed their household for at least three days, as well as toiletries and cleaning supplies.

“Having someone to talk to is so important,” Jodie says. “On a few occasions, Liam has said that he is leaving feeling better and lighter than when he came in. The foodbank is a hub in the community where people can come, have a cuppa and talk about everything going on in their lives. It makes me happy when I know people feel comfortable and safe enough to come here and be just as they are.”

BLYTHSWOOD C



Jodie (right) with foodbank volunteer Usman: ‘It makes me happy when I know people feel comfortable and safe enough to come here and be just as they are.’

Established by Blythswood in the Burdiehouse district of Edinburgh in 2011, the foodbank is now in the process of setting up as a charity in its own right as part of the Trussell network. Jodie says: “We have a local board in place and we’re looking to grow over the coming months.”

“The foodbank is a hub in the community where people can come, ...and talk....”



Bianca visits Vasile, who is recovering from a stroke

SUPPORT FOR THE ELDERLY IN RURAL ROMANIA

The villages of Salaj County, Romania, can look idyllic on a sunny day. But the reality of day-to-day life in rural areas is not easy, especially for elderly people without family support. When Vasile, now 87, suffered a stroke, he received hospital care for a short time and was then sent home. His wife, too, is elderly and in need of medical attention. Their home is in a village on the far side of a river and is difficult to reach from the main road.

The Elpis Foundation runs a programme which translates as 'Together for a Better Life', with support from Blythswood. It helps elderly people such as Vasile and his wife with home visits, cleaning, and collecting shopping and prescriptions. Making sure that they have sufficient firewood is an essential task in an

environment where homes are typically heated by a ceramic stove.

"Our team will also cook them a meal, share the gospel, read the Bible to them, and help them cope with official paperwork such as utility bills," says Elpis worker Sorina Pop. "Sometimes they need to make a call using Bianca's phone, our social worker."

'Together for a Better Life' is the only accredited social programme in an area covering 12 villages. At present, it helps 35 elderly people to continue living in their own homes. "Our team reports great job satisfaction," Sorina says. "The quality of the service they provide is recognised as being very good."

HELP FOR CHILDREN WHO STRUGGLE TO MAKE THE GRADE

Marinela does not excel at schoolwork. But at 14, she has reached seventh grade without having to repeat a year. And that in itself is an achievement for a child with parents who are illiterate and older siblings who dropped out of school.

In Romania, a pupil must achieve a certain standard in order to progress from one year to the next. Talita Kum, Blythswood's after-school programme in Jimbolia, is designed to help children from less-advantaged families to make the grade.

Talita Kum director Adrian Popa says: "There's a good chance Marinela will make it to year eight, meaning she will most likely complete her secondary education. She is keen on sports and her wrestling club takes her to national tournaments. Perhaps we can direct her towards a career as a sports coach."

Adrian is passionate about the importance of making sure that



Talita Kum enables Marinela to persevere at school

non-academic young people from disadvantaged backgrounds achieve basic numeracy and literacy. "It gives them dignity and a sense of personal achievement," he says. "It's essential for employment, to get a driving licence, to avoid exploitation and premature marriage, to integrate into society. And I want them to be able to read the Christian scriptures for themselves."

"Perhaps we can direct her towards a career as a sports coach."



A bible verse poster greets customers at the door

MOST PRECIOUS ITEM EVER FOUND IN A BLYTHSWOOD SHOP

'We were so encouraged and blessed to see your shop posters with the Word of God on display as we stepped off our ship.'

'The first thing we saw when we set our feet on your island was the word of God and it made our day.'

Just two of the comments received by Isobel Macleod, who runs Blythswood's shop on the quayside in Portree. "It's always a delight to hear people read our Bible verse posters aloud," she says. "As they

either translate or explain to each other what they think the verses might mean, we pray that the words they read will be a blessing to them."

Visited by cruise ships and holiday traffic, Portree on the Isle of Skye is a hotspot for tourists. Christians on holiday are surprised and pleased to find a selection of Christian books. "Many of them live in places where there are now no longer any Christian bookshops near them," Isobel says. "They are pleased to have an opportunity to buy books, Bibles and cards."

And local customers are appreciative, too. In the weeks before Easter, Blythswood's shops offered customers a free copy of *The Man on the Middle Cross* by Alistair Begg. "People were very receptive," Isobel says. "Some asked if they could take copies to give to their friends."

Last summer, an Asian lady came into the shop with her family and Isobel heard them talking about the Bibles on display: "I went over to speak to them and quickly realised that she wanted one but that her husband did not want to spend money. So, I told her I had one which she could have for free."

"As I went to get it for her, the rest of the family left the shop. She was so delighted, she wrapped her arms around it and held it tight and whispered, 'So precious, so precious, so precious.' She told me she had been borrowing one from a library, but had to keep returning it and then wait to take it out again. She said she had no

idea where to get one - 'and here you are giving me one for free. This is so precious. Thank you, thank you, thank you.'"

Isobel admits that she, too, was profoundly affected by the incident. She says, "There are people living amongst us who

don't even know where they can find a Bible to read for themselves."

Blythswood's Chief Executive, Jeremy Ross says: "As Blythswood supports gospel ministry in other countries, I'm so pleased that people encounter the good news in our own shops, here at home."

'I ASK GOD TO TAKE ME HOME'

Semion used to be a key figure in his village in central Moldova. As team leader in his kolkhoz or collective farm, and as the tractor driver, he was respected as a hardworking and reliable man.

But that was a long time ago. Now his days are quiet. His wife passed away several years ago. They had one son, but Semion no longer knows where he is, nor how to reach him. Sometimes a kind neighbour brings him a bowl of food but most of the time he is alone. His body is weak and the pain in his joints often keeps him awake at night.

Older - he's 76 - and living in poverty, Semion is typical of the hundreds of people helped every month by a team from Betania Baptist Church with support from Blythswood, bringing food, clothing and footwear. And some things are more important than food.



Semion: most of the time he is alone

"His mind is still clear, and he remembers the past with tears," says team leader Valentina Feodorova. "When we spoke about eternity and the hope which we have in Christ, he began to cry. 'I'm tired,' he told us. 'I ask God to take me home.' "He said it was the first time in many years that someone had spoken to him about God's love. We prayed together, asking that God would give him peace and comfort in his final years."



Tanya with the flour: she in turn, cares for the elderly in her village

Margarita is one of 19 pastoral workers supported by Blythswood in Eastern European countries. “My goal is to develop the new evangelical community in Nova Zagora,” she says. Margarita is accompanied by her husband and by a group of women from the city of Sliven, 40km away.

Isaiah’s prophecy speaks of Jesus bringing good news to the poor and healing to the broken-hearted, and Margarita’s ministry reflects that practical concern, bringing flour to families in need. Tanya, from a village near Nova Zagora, is one of many to benefit. “She lives in great poverty but still takes care of elderly women who ask her for help,” Margarita says. “Two weeks ago, she had breast surgery and it is difficult for her to cope with travelling to Sliven for examinations and treatment.

“But despite the difficulties, she perseveres in faith and always finds time to attend our meeting. When she received the flour, she was very happy and grateful.”

THE GOSPEL IN ACTION IN BULGARIA

Why did Christ come? The answer in Isaiah 61:1 was one of the messages that Margarita Dimitrova took to the town of Nova Zagora in southeast Bulgaria in the lead-up to Christmas.

Help us continue to bring good news to the poor and healing to the broken-hearted. Go to [Blythswood.org/donate](https://www.blythswood.org/donate)

HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE SECURE THEIR FUTURE

An eighteenth birthday is regarded as a milestone by most young people growing up. But for Cosmin, it was also a deadline: fostered by the same family from the age of 11 months, he knew that his living arrangements would come to an end that day and that he would be expected to move out.

His predicament explains the reason behind Blythswood’s Daniel Centre, on the outskirts of Cluj, Romania. The continued role of family relationships is taken for granted by most of us making the transition from adolescence to adulthood. And those who lack that support can be at a huge disadvantage – one which the Daniel Centre sets out to overcome. Although Cosmin had left school at 17 and had a supermarket job, he knew he wasn’t ready to go it alone.

His case manager from the social work department referred Cosmin to the Daniel Centre. Like the other young men there, he has benefitted from the centre’s basic life skills training. He says: “I have learned to cook, to clean my room, to stay healthy and to manage my finances.”



Cosmin at the Daniel Centre: trained and licensed to work in store security, he would like to join the armed forces

Cosmin is careful to save his wages and for 15 months has been working as a security man at a shopping centre. He completed three months of training to obtain a licence for this role. But his ambition is to join the army.

“He has applied and will hear when there is an opening,” says Daniel Centre social worker, Dani Ciupe. He explains that as the army is relatively well-paid, there is no shortage of applicants. Cosmin will have to pass psychological tests.

Dani says: “If Cosmin succeeds in his ambition, he will be the first young person from the Daniel Centre to join the armed forces.”



Matt Nicol - Missional Shop Manager, Harbour Road

‘SPOONS AND POLICE TRAINED MATT FOR BLYTHSWOOD

Sunday evening in Tain Parish Church. Matt was 11, and his grandfather was in the pulpit: “He held up the Bible at the end of his sermon and said, ‘I wouldn’t give this up for all the money in the world.’ That made me realise that to my papa, his Bible, his belief in Jesus, wasn’t just on the surface, it was really important.

“Afterwards, I told him I wanted that, too. He gave me a hug and said, ‘God knows exactly how much you love him. And

regardless of how much that is, he’ll always love you more.”

Anyone who doubts the reality of childhood religious experience should visit Blythswood’s store on Harbour Road in Inverness and talk to Matt Nicol, who took on the role of missional shop manager last year – and ask him how he got there via the police and Wetherspoons.

“When I left school, I did a law degree in Aberdeen,” he says. “Then two years as an officer with Police Scotland really opened my eyes to other people’s circumstances and to the hardships they go through. My own upbringing had been so sheltered.”

Deciding a police career wasn’t for him, Matt returned to Inverness and to Wetherspoons, where he had worked as a student. “Their training is really good,” he says. “I was a bar shift manager, working with a team of over 40 people, managing shifts, rotas, stocktaking and things like that.

“It was a good company to work for, but after six years, I just had this sense of not really being satisfied by it anymore.” Friends told him that Blythswood was looking for a shop manager. “My initial reaction was no, I can’t do that. But others told me I had the skill set. I was quite shy growing up, but the police and the pub taught me how to talk to absolutely anybody.

“In the shop, you see the same faces

again and again, and you have this opportunity to build relationships. It’s not just about sharing my faith but about encouraging people through the hope that I have in Jesus and what he’s accomplished for all of us.

“One customer told me about going through a rough time and how she’d sought help in worldly beliefs and then came to faith in Jesus. We had a really

wonderful conversation.

“Sometimes I’m overwhelmed by the level of support with donations of really excellent furniture, bric-a-brac and clothes. Asking people to Gift Aid what they bring can start a conversation and allow us to show sympathy to those who are clearing a home and trusting us with things that belonged to their parents. Our challenge is to steward it well.”

VOLUNTEERING LETS YOU MEET OTHER PEOPLE

Having worked in retail and in recycling, Pete was between jobs when a friend suggested he might like to volunteer for Blythswood. That was in 2011. Fifteen years later, he still volunteers in Blythswood’s shop in Banbridge, Northern Ireland, now giving four days a week to the organisation.

“Mostly I serve at the till,” Pete says. “And I deal with donated goods, move furniture and help in different ways.”

Apart from Blythswood, Pete’s interests include rugby (you’ll not find him in the shop on Saturdays) and motorbike racing, sometimes travelling as far afield as Duns in the Scottish borders to marshal at motocross events.

So why does he give so much time as a charity shop volunteer? “It’s an opportunity to mix with other people,”



Pete in Banbridge: ‘Volunteering is an opportunity to mix with other people’

he says. “I really enjoy it. There are four volunteers in the Banbridge shop and I get on with everybody.”

To find out how you can volunteer for Blythswood, email volunteer@blythswood.org or call **01349 830777** (Scotland) or **028 9334 9859** (Northern Ireland).



Kelly is one of 46 people to enrol for the eight-month training programme in 2026

SEWING SKILLS OPPORTUNITY FOR KELLY

Kelly is looking forward to starting a new chapter in her life as she embarks on the sewing skills training in Harare, Zimbabwe, provided by Streams of Hope with support from Blythswood. As a young person growing up in difficult circumstances, her opportunities have been restricted by poverty.

When her parents split up, she had already started school. To escape domestic violence, her mum left Harare

and returned to village life, taking the younger children with her. Kelly remained in the city with her father's family, but when he left for South Africa and didn't stay in touch, she found herself without support.

She tried to raise money for school fees by working in people's gardens but it was not enough. "I didn't even have enough to eat," she says.

Someone with a sewing shop in Harare's central business district told Kelly about the free sewing skills training programme. "Kelly wasted no time in approaching us," says Streams of Hope director, Stephen Damuputirai. "She too would like to be able to start her own business and to be able to support her mother and younger sisters."

NUTRITION & EDUCATION GO HAND-IN-HAND AT SARGY

Without Sargy, Brian wouldn't be in school at all. His father is dead and his mother is very well. In this situation, finding money for food is a problem and paying school fees is an impossibility.

"The child could not enrol in other schools because his parents could not afford to pay," says Samwel Okomo, director of Sargy Education Centre. "So, they applied to Sargy and their boy was accepted. This has relieved his mother from worrying about food."

The children at Sargy receive both breakfast and lunch, giving them the nutrition required to grow strong, to study and to play sports. The food supplied contains all the components of a balanced diet, with fresh vegetables for vitamins and minerals, rice and ugali for energy, and peas and beans for protein.

Samwel says: "Brian is in good health and is performing well at school."

Sargy Education Centre serves a low-income community on the shores of Lake Victoria, Kenya. Currently, over 300 students attend the school, receiving quality education and those all-important two meals a day, enabling them to grow, learn and play.

For Brian, school means not just education, but that he eats well for five days a week





Your support for Blythswood's Basis Project relieves Irma and others like her of the stress of living on very low incomes

HELP FOR THOSE LEFT BEHIND

Irma belongs to a generation that spent their best years working in the fields of communist Europe for scant reward and now face old age with little claim on the new prosperity which surrounds them.

Her village is not far from the booming economy of Cluj-Napoca, the location of high-tech businesses such as Bosch and Emerson. Her home, originally her parents', belongs to a different age, almost a different world. A solid fuel stove is used to cook food and warm the home. Above the kitchen table, Mary, Joseph and the infant Jesus share the wall with Irma's father in his army uniform, and family from the past, frozen in monochrome print.

But Irma has no family to help her now and her allowance from the state equates to just £100 a month. "That's her sole source of income," explains Agnes

Csiszer, who runs the Basis Project for Blythswood Romania. "Since her situation was brought to our attention, volunteers from the Reformed Church have delivered a Blythswood food package to Irma each month, ensuring that she has the food she needs.

"This makes a big difference to Irma and relieves her of some of the day-to-day stress of living on a very limited income."

Basis currently supports 33 low-income households - approximately 135 people - in the vicinity of Cluj-Napoca. "Irma and others in her situation are deeply grateful for the assistance and for the companionship," Agnes says. "Even when they are too reserved to talk about personal religion, they are happy for someone to read from the Bible and to pray."



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Picture Credit: Suzanne Rushton / Unsplash

Precious item found in Portree shop – see page 10

A TRANSFORMATIVE MESSAGE

The Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. (Isaiah 61:1)

Margarita has a transformative message to bring to her town in Bulgaria. And when you read the stories in this issue of Blythswood News, you'll see she's not alone. Preaching good news to the poor, binding up the broken-hearted and proclaiming freedom for captives is being done again and again through international partnerships and through gospel opportunities in our charity shops.

The good news we share and the practical help we bring allow us to bind up broken-hearted people like Elizabeth in Ukraine, making their present reality that bit more bearable. And there's good news for disadvantaged children like Marinela, as she receives the educational support she needs at Talita Kum in Romania. For her and for children such as Brian at Sargy school in Kenya, freedom from poverty and exploitation will be a great result.

Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled uniquely by Jesus, who took these words upon his lips and declared them his own personal ministry: 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing' (Luke 4:21). By his Spirit, we seek its outworking in our own day, changing lives for good and forever.

Yes, we can bring good news to the poor and change their lives for good. The Bible tells us to care for the most disadvantaged, the orphan and the widow. But there's more to it, a message that changes hearts and lives forever, the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ. It's the best news ever, in the words of a visitor to one of our shops, 'so precious, so precious, so precious'.

Your support is part of this ministry. Thank you very much indeed.

Jeremy Ross
Chief Executive



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