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A Grand Finish



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SUPPORT PLEDGED





BULGARIA

The literacy program teachers and participants finished off the school year in grand style this year! Our excursion was to the Sofia Zoo, and the weather cooperated nicely as we were able to walk around the zoo and have our picnic lunch, complete with ice cream, in between the rain showers!

Our pastor and a guest from Great Britain were with us for our “Demonstration Day”. This is the time the children are able to show-off what they have learned throughout the year. They did a great job of demonstrating their more advanced reading, writing, and math problem solving skills. Each learner was rewarded at the end with a diploma that showed they had attended regularly during the year and had demonstrated a willingness to learn, as well as a book. The teens received a Bulgarian copy of *Bible Explorer: God’s Word From Genesis to Revelation*. The youngest children received a brand-new publication in Bulgarian of *The Jesus Storybook Bible* or Max Lucado’s illustrated children’s book *You Are Special*.

The last day was Movie Day, with pizza, cookies and a Bible story video.

A handbell choir of 18 teens and their leaders arrived at Sofia Baptist Church from Pennsylvania in late June to teach the youth in the church how to play the bells. They invited the literacy kids for two mornings of Bible stories, crafts and an abbreviated lesson in playing the bells. The literacy children were thrilled to meet these teenagers from the United States, see a musical instrument they’d never even heard of before, get to have their own private concert, and actually get to play the handbells!

As I reflect on the past year that God entrusted us with helping these precious children, I have a few lessons learned and some gleanings:

-Some excellent conversations about the Bible and God continue to happen. The children ask good questions and the teachers are able to help them see more clearly.

-It’s always rather stressful as we plan for the literacy kids’ participation in Sofia Baptist Church’s Christmas and Easter programs. They have their part alongside the church’s Sunday School children and are welcomed by the congregation. But attendance at rehearsals is sometimes sporadic, and we never know until the very last minute who will actually know their lines and show up for the evening program! I really should know by now that the kids always pull through! They are proud to be in front of an appreciative audience and do their best. I’m a bit partial, but I think they often know their lines and perform better than any of the other groups!

-Some of the children’s mothers and grandmothers are now employed as cleaners on the streets or other places. While the job is not what I dream for these kids, it does contribute to peace of mind and well-being for the children themselves. With the parents bringing in an income, the children will be more likely to be able to stay in school and be free to come to literacy class.

I see that if the parents are unemployed the children are far less likely to attend school at all. These families tend to move around a lot, and there is no stability for the children. They may not be able to come to literacy if they are having to beg on the streets or get a menial job themselves, or they may move far from the church, or even move to another city. I believe we have lost two of our longtime girls in the program over the past months because of just this issue.

The literacy class is now out for summer vacation. We will begin again on September 18. Please pray for safety for all the children over the summer, and that they will return to the program in the Fall remembering some of what they learned over this past year!

We are thankful for each of you who support us in so many ways to be able to be in this beautiful country and join God at work in Bulgaria! Your prayers are felt when we are struggling or unsure, and there have been many of those moments in the last months! Your personal financial support keeps us on the field. Your gifts to our ministry keeps programs like the Literacy program going. It is funded entirely by American Baptist women who give to the White Cross and STEP programs, and has been for 15 years now. Thank you for partnering with us in ministry.

Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people". Philemon 1:7 (NIV)



