



# WINGS OF HOPE INTERNATIONAL

TRANSFORMING **the lives of people in MOLDOVA**

Volume 7, Issue 1

Fall 2019

## Community Center Open House



## Message from the President

It is my privilege to greet you again at the end of this calendar year. It's been another year full of activities for Wings of Hope International's (WHI) partner in Moldova, NGO Neemia. This newsletter is a little different from the previous ones. If in the previous newsletters the majority of content was written by myself, this year we wanted to allow others who have been involved with WHI to share their ideas, experiences, etc.



*Andre and Alec at the Community Center Open House*

As in the previous several summers, I traveled to Moldova visiting family and completing some work with our partner in Cobani, NGO Neemia. During the second half of my trip, Andre Drost, a member of WHI's board of directors, joined me in Moldova. Andre has been a member of WHI's board since we founded the organization in 2007 and this was his first time traveling and seeing the impact that WHI has been having on the village of Cobani for more than 10 years.

In addition, two of Andre's sons, Foster and Porter, came with him to help with the organization of a soccer camp. I enjoyed having the three of them in Cobani and helping with the soccer camp. I hope you will enjoy reading their impressions from their trip to Moldova.

Another piece of news that I would like to share with you is that now there is an American in Cobani for 365 days a year. Sean Grossnickle, a Peace Corps volunteer, will be spending two years in Cobani, working with Victor and the Neemia team. Working with Neemia is just one area of his service in Cobani and we are looking forward to his updates on the impact that he will be making during the next two years. I hope you will enjoy his first impressions about his time in Cobani.

Another important event that happened this summer, was an Open House at the Community Center in Cobani. Our partner, NGO Neemia, has been planning to have this event for about two years and this summer was a good opportunity to organize one while Andre and I were in Moldova. It was a great opportunity for the Neemia team to share with the community their work that they have been doing in Cobani for the past four years and to encourage the community to become involved in various community building activities.

Although this newsletter discusses most of our support for the Community Center for this year, we continued to support the school, the kindergarten, and the health center in Cobani. We will update you on those efforts in our next newsletter.

I hope you will enjoy reading this newsletter and continue to support our efforts to transform the lives of many Moldovans. If you are reading this newsletter for the first time, please consider making a donation to WHI. If you have donated in the past, we would like to express our sincerest thanks and we hope you will continue supporting us in transforming the lives of many needy in Moldova.

With Hope for the **Moldovan** People,



## Community Center Impact: Sharing From the Heart

*By Victor Zama, Director, NGO Neemia*

It is my pleasure to share a few insights about the work of NGO Neemia in Cobani and the impact that many from the US have had on our work in bringing hope to the needy in Cobani. When my family and I moved to Cobani four years ago, one of the things that struck us was the lack of hope for the elderly and lack of opportunities for children and young people. Immediately our desire was to do something to bring hope and change to the people in Cobani. After sharing our vision with WHI's board of directors, they were open for a partnership to work together to bring hope and improve the quality of life for many in the village. Through this partnership, WHI has been providing the funding and Neemia has been implementing various programs and services for various groups in Cobani.

During the last four years hundreds of children benefited from our camps and clubs, hundreds of elderly and poor families have received donations of coal, food, and other needed items. One of the greatest impacts Neemia has had on our community came when we opened the Community Center three years ago. Our vision was that the Community Center would be a place where people feel loved, accepted and cared for, a place where people could find hope and opportunities. We would like to report that our vision is being fulfilled as at the Community Center, we have been able to offer opportunities for children and young people to be part of different clubs like: guitar, reading, volunteers', youth, science, children's, English, mother and toddlers, cooking club, etc. In addition to year around activities, every summer we organize between 6-10 camps for kids in Cobani.

Food, from our kitchen at the Community Center, is being delivered, three times a week, to about 28 needy families in the village. Twenty children from low income families have the opportunity eat hot lunches three times per week and participate in an afterschool program where they complete their homework and engage in other developmental activities. Some children from low income families are able to take needed showers (most homes in the village don't have running water); some elderly people are benefiting from being able to wash their clothes at the community center.

As the director of NGO Neemia, I have many reasons to express my gratitude and appreciation for all the help we have had from WHI but I would like to use the words many times I hear from those who benefit from our programs and services.

**Ecaterina is 90 years old** and had worked as a geography teacher for 44 years. She knows where USA is on the map and almost every time I take lunch to her or visit her with other donations she wants me to pass many thanks to the good people from far away. After 44 years of hard work Ecaterina gets a pension of 1,400 Moldovan Lei (about \$85) per month. She also looks after her disabled daughter and life is not easy for her. That's why every time she gets help she feels that she is not forgotten and that she matters. This means hope. That means that Wings of Hope International working in partnership with Neemia are bringing hope to the needy in Cobani.

**Dumitrita is 20 years old** and was a member of a group of Neemia volunteers for three years and now she is a student in Romania. Every time when she returns to the village, she always comes to the community center to visit us and always is ready to help if assistance is needed. Dumitrita has told us numerous times that her time that she spent as a Neemia volunteer has had a very significant impact on her development and the lessons that she learned as a volunteer are helping her during her university studies. Starting with the first days of her university studies she decided that she will become involved as a volunteer at the university in various capacities.

**Lidia is 82 years old** and lives by herself and has been experiencing many health problems. Some time back we heard about her and we decided to evaluate her situation to see if we could provide assistance through Neemia. As we were analyzing her situation we have heard from other people in the village that Lidia is a very demanding person and always finds reasons to complain. In spite of what we heard, we decided to provide assistance because she was in a very difficult situation. As we started visiting and delivering hot meals to her, we were pleasantly surprised that Lidia never said a negative word to us and was always welcoming us into her home and has always expressed words of gratitude for all the assistance that we have been providing. Here is what Lidia often tells us when we visit her "Thank you very much for coming to visit me and bring hot meals three times per week. I could barely move and I am unable to prepare any meals. The most significant thing for me is that there are people like you who come to visit me and with whom I could just talk. You are doing a very important work for me and I am very thankful".

On behalf of the many children, young people, elderly and other needy in Cobani who have been served by Neemia, and from all of us at Neemia, we would like to express our sincerest thanks for the funding that many Americans have provided to WHI. We couldn't have been able to serve the needy in Cobani without your help. We hope that you will continue to support WHI and in turn support us in Cobani. THANK YOU!



*Neemia Volunteers and Staff Members*



## Impressions and Realizations

*By Andre Drost, Vice President, Wings of Hope Int'l*

This year, for the first time and hopefully the first of many, I was blessed with the opportunity to travel to Moldova with Alec Zama. I have known Alec for over 20 years and been able to learn about him and Moldova during that time and had the opportunity to learn while serving on the board of WHI for many years. This trip provided me a great opportunity to see God's active love towards us through His ministering through us to one another.

One of the main things that Alec made sure we did while there was visit with each partner we serve through WHI. We had the opportunity to meet with the directors of the health center and the kindergarten, the school principal and Neemia, not to mention elderly individuals who are served. Clearly WHI has impacted the daily function of hundreds if not thousands of individuals over the past decade.

At the health center the director took painstaking care to point out and take pictures with us of all of the different equipment WHI has assisted them in procuring. This has allowed them to do many tests in the village without having to send the patient away to larger cities. This is not only beneficial to most villagers who do not own vehicles, but also helps the elderly and families with elderly in the village by making care more accessible and less of a burden for family members still caring for elderly in the village. Part of WHI's goal for these partnerships is for the partner to identify funding from additional sources, and the health center is doing well at this.

The kindergarten and school daily put to use many items that WHI has assisted in purchasing. The children have educational materials, educational facility improvements and improved learning opportunities as a result of WHI's involvement. It was also good to see the beginnings of cooperative work between partners. The school has a cellar as a result of WHI involvement, which helps them purchase items at cheaper prices and store them. The school accepted the assistance for the cellar and in turn allows Neemia to store items there.

Neemia was the main partner we participated with on this trip. They shared their blessings with us in numerous ways. Neemia organized a soccer camp and gave us a chief seat letting us coach and teach throughout the week to 30+ children. We were given the opportunity to meet some of the elderly they help with meals on wheels (or feet). And my son got to grow as an educator by providing some youth an opportunity to practice English. This organization is reaching the community in innumerable ways, and WHI is fortunate enough to participate with them in bringing vitality to the community.

What a blessing it was to me as a board member of WHI to see firsthand the community of Cobani and the influence WHI has had there. Alec's faithfulness to serve and give to his neighbors has clearly been a blessing to them, and we are blessed to be able to

share in that opportunity. I would like to thank the entire Zama family for letting Foster, Porter and myself participate in God's work of love amongst those in the community of Cobani. I look forward to a time when, Lord willing, I can return.

*By Porter Drost*

My name is Porter Drost and I am 14 years old and live a few miles away from Alec and Becky Zama in Ankeny, Iowa. This summer I had the pleasure of going to the country of Moldova with my brother, father, and Alec Zama and his brother Vasile and his family. This was my first time being out of the country and I was in Moldova for two weeks.

The first week I helped with a soccer camp. I really enjoyed getting to know the kids in the village and playing soccer with them. While there I came to the realization that I am spoiled. I have many of the things I have ever wanted, while some of the kids there that love to play soccer don't even have soccer shoes. I brought some of my old soccer shoes that were in very good condition and gave them to a kid who didn't have any; it was like he couldn't believe his eyes and ears, he had to ask several times to make sure that I had meant it. It touched my heart getting to see him admire the shoes.

After and during the days that there was soccer camp, which was a lot of fun, and for some of the second week, I helped pass out food to the poor and needy, helped to do chores and played some more soccer with the other kids in the village. Towards

the end of the second week we went back to Chisinau, which is the capital city of Moldova, and did some sightseeing. I learned a decent amount of the history of Moldova while there.

One of the big things that I took home with me is that I should be extremely thankful for all the things that I have and that I should never be getting mad about not getting what I want and not having certain things but instead praise the Lord for what I do have.

*By Foster Drost*

My trip to Moldova was an eye-opening experience in many ways from village roads to prices for goods to the character and spiritual aspects of the people in Moldova. During my time in Cobani I assisted Neemia in the delivery of meals to the needy in the village. Because some of the roads were not drivable, we had to walk to different parts of the village on roads that sometime were hard and even dangerous to walk. I was struck by the conditions in which many elderly live. I met some who are blind, some who are bedridden and others who just needed someone to talk to. I remember going to a lady by the name of Tecla who lived on the opposite side of the village. She was very excited to see us but when she came out of the house to greet us she lost her balance and couldn't get up. Victor and I lifted her up and moved her inside the house. I



*Foster, Porter, and Andre Drost*



was struck by how small the house was, about the size of our dining room. Inside the house I met her husband who is blind and barely gets out of the bed. I also delivered meals to a gentleman without limbs, all four froze. He has some relatives who come to visit him but he eagerly waits for someone from Neemia to deliver a hot meal three times per week. I also visited another gentleman who is blind and lives by himself. It struck me that many longed for conversations, perhaps more than the hot meal we brought.

I also enjoyed participating in the soccer camp. We had two practices each day during which I would assist my dad with coaching and then participating along with the other kids in the drills. I enjoyed sharing some of my experiences playing soccer in Iowa and seeing how the kids at the camp were learning new skills. I also, enjoyed the lessons that my dad delivered related to responsibility, hard work, cooperation, loyalty, teamwork, etc.

Another experience that I had was teaching English at the Community Center. I had four meetings with children of different ages. Although not everything went as planned, I had to adjust my expectations and try to teach and learn. I was able to use cartoons to teach some basic English and the children who attended these lessons taught me the Romanian alphabet. Overall, it was a mutually beneficial experience.

Overall, this trip was a very good experience for me. I learned more about the culture of Moldova, learned new Romanian words, met new people and shared with them different aspects of America. This experience taught me not to take for granted many things that we have in America.

## WHI Goals for 2020

On behalf of those who benefited from the services of WHI during the past year, we would like to thank you for your generous support. WHI will continue to improve the lives of the most needy in Moldova in 2020. We will focus on improving educational opportunities for children, improving access to quality healthcare and assisting the elderly. Here are the fundraising goals for the upcoming year:

**Community Center - \$31,000**  
**Children projects - \$2,500**  
**Healthcare projects - \$2,000**  
**Elderly projects - \$2,500**

*Please join us in achieving these goals and remember, your WHI contribution is tax-deductible!*

*Please visit our website for more photos of our work in Cobani!*

### Board of Directors

**Alec Zama, President**  
**Dennis Dixon, Treasurer**

**Andre Drost, Vice-President**  
**Becky Zama, Secretary**

## Welcome to Cobani, Sean!

*By Sean Grossnickle, Peace Corp Volunteer in Cobani*

I was born and grew up in the United States of America. After graduating from college, I decided to pursue volunteering through the Peace Corps and was assigned to Moldova. I was assigned to complete my two years in Cobani where my primary partner is the Community Center, an activity of Neemia, funded by Wings of Hope International (WHI). I will be also working with mayor's office and the local school and library.



*Sean Grossnickle and kids from the Community Center.*

When I first came to Cobani in August of 2019, I was amazed to see the life that was in the village. I was overwhelmed by the welcoming people, the beautiful and talented children, and the opportunities that people have here that other villages can only dream of having. Neemia plays a huge role in helping bring this about and ensures that the marginalized people in this community are not forgotten. I have the opportunity to help each entity with their strategic management, encourage collaboration among institutions, teach several English clubs, teach an entrepreneurship club with youth, and help with the volunteers at the community center.

That being said, we still have a lot of work to do. Moldova is the poorest country in Europe and many people can barely sustain themselves on their low salaries and pensions. Some do not know how they will heat their home for the winter. Most houses still do not have running water and people often lack resources to live a healthy lifestyle (or sometimes even eat). Every institution in the village is underfunded and the school does not have the resources to provide teachers with proper materials to teach effectively (in addition to having no running water and still using the outhouse from the 1960s). Every dollar you contribute helps not just Neemia, but the entire village have hope for the future of everyone in Cobani and the country as a whole. I love the people of this village and I believe together we can make a lasting impact in the lives of each person in Cobani. If you have more questions or are interested in an American perspective on life in the village, feel free to email me at [grossnicklesi@gmail.com](mailto:grossnicklesi@gmail.com), or follow my blog at [moldivaland.home.blog](http://moldivaland.home.blog).