



**Oxford Aid to the Balkans  
(OXAB)  
Annual Report 2013-2014  
Registered charity no 1109140**



## Table of Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Letter from the Trustees.....</b>   | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>Objectives.....</b>                 | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>History of OXAB.....</b>            | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>Where we work.....</b>              | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>Beneficiaries.....</b>              | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>Projects.....</b>                   | <b>7</b>  |
| <i>Mentoring Project.....</i>          | <i>7</i>  |
| <i>Internships Project.....</i>        | <i>8</i>  |
| <i>Children's Club.....</i>            | <i>10</i> |
| <i>Volunteer trips.....</i>            | <i>11</i> |
| <b>Other Activities.....</b>           | <b>13</b> |
| <i>Staff training/supervision.....</i> | <i>13</i> |
| <i>Christmas 2013.....</i>             | <i>14</i> |
| <i>Donations.....</i>                  | <i>14</i> |
| <b>Contributors.....</b>               | <b>15</b> |
| <b>Volunteers and Staff.....</b>       | <b>16</b> |
| <b>Looking forward to 2014-15.....</b> | <b>17</b> |
| <b>How to help.....</b>                | <b>18</b> |
| <b>Financial Statements.....</b>       | <b>19</b> |



### **Cover Photos**

**(Top)** English Club in Balvan, Bulgaria

**(Middle)** Craft in Balvan, mentoring pair ice-skating, Oxford volunteers in Albania

**(Bottom)** Mentoring pairs, craft in Bosnia

**(Left)** group activity at the Ksilifor outdoor activity centre, May 2013.



## Letter from the Trustees

This year, 2013-14, is an important one for OXAB. It is now twenty years since the very first OXAB volunteer trip to refugee camps in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and ten years since OXAB became a registered UK charity. It is also ten years since we visited the children's home in Balvan, Bulgaria, for the first time, and talked through the first ideas for OXAB's long-term projects with local volunteers.

A lot has changed in the last ten years. On our first visit to the Hristo Smirnenski Home in Balvan, we were greeted by sixty children scrambling to hold our hands and arms, desperate for attention, and living cramped together in awful conditions. Now, ten years later, not only has the building been completely renovated, but it is home to just twenty children, with staff having specific roles as 'key workers' for small groups of children. Specialised centres have also been developed, such as the family-style home and crisis centre, both of which are now supported by OXAB. Nevertheless, deinstitutionalisation is a slow process, and the role of OXAB Bulgaria in working alongside the local social services is still crucial. In this report, you can read more about the successes of our mentoring project, internships scheme and children's club, all of which provide social and educational support to children growing up in care – from fun craft activities for 5-6 years olds, to support for care-leavers to attend university. On page 17, you can also learn about our plans to increase the long-term sustainability of our projects through funding for OXAB Bulgaria to hire a local member of staff to look into funding opportunities, as well as ongoing capacity building with local staff and volunteers.

At the same time, this year marks a return to our roots, as OXAB begins to work with refugee organisations in Bulgaria. Almost ten thousand refugees have entered Bulgaria in the past year, many of them Syrians crossing the land border from Turkey. Although this is a very small percentage of those displaced by the Syrian crisis worldwide, it marks a huge increase for Bulgaria, and there have been numerous difficulties in ensuring that children have access to education and other services. OXAB is still beginning to work out how we can best use our time and resources, but this promises to be a very worthwhile area to expand to. More information on this, and on our other volunteer projects in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Albania, can be found in this report.

None of OXAB's work in the Balkans would be possible without you, our supporters, and the money and time that you have given. We hope that you will enjoy reading about what we have accomplished with your help, and we look forward to your support in the coming year.

With very best wishes,

Lucy, Chloe and Joanna

OXAB's board of trustees includes three representatives from the long-term projects committee and three from the student committee at the University of Oxford. The current trustees, Chloe Blackmore, Lucy Long, Joanna Flint, Zhi Hao Tan, Dunja Junjic and Anna Phelon, are pleased to present OXAB's annual report and accounts for the financial year 6th April 2013 – 5th April 2014. We hope you will enjoy reading about our work, and would be happy to receive any questions or comments on [balvan@oxab.org.uk](mailto:balvan@oxab.org.uk).

## Objectives

*“Without you, I wouldn’t have fulfilled my dreams.”*

*Valio, the first care-leaver to graduate from our internships*

OXAB is a small charity working with disadvantaged children and young people across the Balkans. As well as sending student volunteers to work in orphanages, day centres and summer camps, OXAB supports a number of long-term educational projects to improve the lives of children and young people and help them to achieve their potential.

## History of OXAB

OXAB was set up in 1993 by a small group of students from the University of Oxford to provide aid to refugees in the former Yugoslavia. Throughout the 1990s, OXAB sent student volunteers to work with children in community centres in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and later expanded volunteer trips to Bulgaria (from 2001) and Albania (from 2009). OXAB became a registered UK charity in 2004 (number 1104190) and operates as an unincorporated charitable association.

In 2006, OXAB’s counterpart NGO, OXAB 2006, was registered in Bulgaria and a group of four OXAB volunteers from both countries - Chloe Blackmore, Joanna Flint, Katia Zlatkova and Steliyana Dulkova – began to develop OXAB’s first long-term projects providing social and educational support to improve the lives and future chances of children living in institutions. The first project was a weekly English Club, started in 2006, followed by a pilot mentoring project in 2008 and the internships project in 2011. All projects are run and co-ordinated by Bulgarian staff and volunteers, with OXAB assisting with strategic direction and funding.



**(Top)** a caregiver and child riding a horse for the first time  
**(Bottom)** an early OXAB volunteer trip to Balvan in 2006

## Where we work

OXAB works with partner organisations in Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania.

- In Bulgaria, our main partner is OXAB 2006, a Bulgarian NGO based in the municipality of Veliko Turnovo. We work with six children’s homes in Veliko Turnovo and the surrounding villages.
- From summer 2014, we are also starting to work with refugee organisations in and around the Bulgarian capital, Sofia.
- In Albania, we work with Swedish NGO, TAMAM, who run a two-week summer camp in the village of Marqinet near the capital, Tirana.
- In Bosnia and Herzegovina we have links with a community centre in Hrasnica, Sarajevo.



Source: Google Maps

## Beneficiaries

### Children's Homes supported by OXAB in Bulgaria

- Hristo Smirnenski Home, Balvan (30 children)
- Crisis Centre for Girls, Balvan (10 children)
- Penyo and Maria Home, Veliko Turnovo (55 children)
- Family-Style Centre for Children at Risk, Veliko Turnovo (10 children)
- Home for Children Deprived of Parental Care, Strajica (50 children)
- Centre for Disabled Children, Gorna Oryahovitsa (50 children)

OXAB's main target group in the Balkans is children living in institutions. Some of these children have been abandoned or orphaned at a young age, while others have been separated from their families due to poverty, abuse or trafficking. We also work with young care-leavers to provide support in the transition to independent life. In addition, our summer volunteer programme reaches out to a wider selection of disadvantaged children across the Balkans.

OXAB's volunteers, both in the UK and in Bulgaria, are also beneficiaries of our projects. Volunteering helps young people to gain new skills and experience, to develop tolerance and to become active citizens, and many of our volunteers go on to work in education, social work or international development. OXAB was one of the first organisations to promote volunteering in the Veliko Turnovo region, and the experience our volunteers have gained has the potential to impact many more disadvantaged children through their future careers.

### In 2013-2014 ...

- 54 children and young care-leavers benefitted from weekly participation in our mentoring, internships or children's club projects.
- 300 children had access to short-term social and educational support through our summer volunteer trips and Christmas celebrations.
- 35 Bulgarian students from the St. Cyril and Methodius University in Veliko Turnovo volunteered weekly with children living in institutions.
- 36 volunteers from the University of Oxford and our partners at Imperial College London and the University of Birmingham spent part of their summer volunteering in the Balkans.

## Projects

### Mentoring Project



*"I am so excited about my new mentor. He is so calm and listening to me, great!"*

*Simeon, 16-year old mentee*

The mentoring project is OXAB's flagship project. Running since 2008, it pairs young people growing up in institutionalised care with a personal volunteer mentor from the local university. The mentoring project aims to provide individualised support to young people as they make the transition from institutionalised care to independent living and to break down the stigma associated with growing up in an institution. The pairs meet once a week for coffee and a chat, and mentors receive on-going training and supervision from qualified social workers. Participants also have the opportunity to take part in a range of activities including outdoor wide games, ice-skating, bowling and an overnight visit to an outdoor activity centre.



### In 2013-2014...

- **35** volunteer mentors from St Cyril and St Methodius University in Veliko Turnovo were trained in listening and communication skills
- **30** young people aged 12-18 from Hristo Smirnenski Home, Penyo and Maria Home and the Family-Style Centre received individual support on a weekly basis from a mentor
- **5** mentors travelled to Balvan once a week to carry out group activities with the younger children
- The mentoring pairs met individually **21** times and took part in ice-skating, bowling, wide games, a Christmas party and an overnight trip to Ksilifor outdoor activity centre.

*"Thank you for existing and for doing such a wonderful thing as a Mentoring project! You have such energy; keep passing the energy to the others. Thank you for letting me be a part of your community!"*

*Svetlana, mentor*

**(Top)** mentoring pair enjoying a walk and chat in the park  
**(Bottom)** group ice-skating event

However, the main impacts of the mentoring project are intangible. Taking part in the mentoring project is about having someone to talk to, someone to share things with without feeling worried or embarrassed. It's about having someone to rely on and someone who is there to listen. This boosts the self-esteem and confidence of the young people taking part and helps to improve their communication skills. It also challenges the stereotypes and prejudices about growing up in an institution held by mentors and wider society.

### Case study: Elena and Rositsa

Elena is 17 years old and has been living in a children's home for five years. Her mother passed away when she was younger and her father is an alcoholic. Elena really misses her family and this has taken a toll on her behaviour – for a long time she lived in a fantasy world and grew accustomed to telling lies and acting aggressively to the younger children in the home. She didn't have many friends and was underestimated by those around her who did not believe she could succeed in life.

Since October 2012, Elena has been meeting regularly with her personal mentor, Rositsa, a second year social work student at St. Cyril and St. Methodi University. Rositsa is serious, calm and responsible, but most importantly, she believes in Elena. With her support, Elena has really changed. She has much more self-esteem and confidence, especially in relation to her school studies. Rositsa's example motivated Elena to improve her marks at school. Now she never misses a lesson and her dream is to go to university when she finishes school in 2014. In such a short time Elena has really grown up and started taking her education and her future seriously. Her behaviour towards the younger children is also much kinder – she has started looking after them, collecting them from school and giving them time and attention.

## Internships Project



(Above) OXAB intern Gosho with a younger child at the Ksilifor outdoor activity centre.

OXAB Internships is a project designed to support bright teenagers leaving Bulgarian children's institutions by giving them the opportunity to study at university and gain valuable work experience at the same time. Since beginning this project in 2011, OXAB has supported seven young care-leavers to make the transition to university and independent life through financial support (subject to regular attendance and good grades at university), an internship programme tailored to their specific interests, and regular support and guidance from a personal mentor.

*"I'm grateful that I have the opportunity to be part of this programme. I like the idea of children who have been in social institutions being able to see the other side of the coin, to feel how it is to be responsible, caring, and for a child to say to me "that's my mentor"."*

*Kristian, OXAB intern*



**(Above)** : Kristian with the younger child he chose to mentor for his internship.

### In 2013-2014...

- **7** young care-leavers received financial support to continue their education at university, as well as participating in tailored internships schemes.
- **5** young care-leavers took part in specialised training for working with children at risk, as well as receiving regular individual support from a mentor.
- **1** student intern, Valio, graduated successfully with a BA in Social Pedagogy. He is continuing to study for a Master's degree alongside working at a local children's home.

Going from a children's home to university is not an easy or a well-trodden path. Most Bulgarian students are supported financially by their parents, and although there is a fee exemption for children from institutions, lack of knowledge about what the university offers, the cost of living and the lack of jobs mean that few institution-leavers in Veliko Turnovo have ever graduated. However, since we began the internships project in 2011, several other local organisations have followed our lead and are offering small stipends to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. What is more, through their internships, our student interns act as role models for children and teenagers in the institutions we work with, encouraging them to continue their education and showing them that university is possible.

### Case study: Goshu

Goshu spent much of his childhood in a village children's home, but was determined to make something of his life. He was accepted to university, found a part-time job in the city to support himself and began his studies. However, the job fell through, his time at the supported accommodation for care-leavers ended, and he began sleeping rough on friends' floors. Part-time work is difficult to find, especially for Roma youth, and Goshu was disillusioned and close to dropping out of university to look for unskilled work abroad.

The internships project began in 2011, when we met Goshu, and since then he has turned his life around. This is his final term at university, and he is confident that he will do well in his final exams in summer 2014. Alongside his studies, Goshu has been a regular volunteer at OXAB's Saturday Club, completed his Bronze Duke of Edinburgh Award and learned English to a level with which he can communicate fairly fluently with foreigners. He is an ambitious young man, and we are confident that he has a bright future ahead.

## Children's Club



**(Top)** Child playing outside at the Balvan Saturday Club

**(Bottom)** Food cooked by teenagers taking part in the Cookery Club

*"This is really fun, look at the cool stuff we're making!"*

**Simeon**

The Children's Club is OXAB's longest running project at the Children's Home in Balvan. Since starting out as a weekly English Club in 2006, the club has expanded to include arts and crafts, cookery and dance activities. These activities appeal to different children, and almost all the children have their own favourite activities which they take part in regularly.

### In 2013-2014 ...

- **10-20** children participated in a weekly Saturday Club with dance, sports, games and arts and craft activities organised by 4 student volunteers, most of them young care-leavers who had gone on to university through our internships scheme.
- **12** children have improved their English skills thanks to the Real English School in Veliko Turnovo, who provided us with a qualified native speaker teacher.
- **6** younger children have made jewellery, flowers and other crafts, many of which have been sold at local events to raise money for the children and the home.
- **5** teenagers have learned how to cook – a skill which will be useful in their transition to independent life.

When OXAB began the Children's Club in 2006, the home housed up to 65 children deprived of even the most basic of necessities. While the material conditions have improved immeasurably over the past decade, and the number of children has fallen drastically, there is still a need for individual attention and fun, educational activities which the staff do not always have the time or resources to provide. OXAB's Children's Club staff and volunteers give the children at the home more opportunity for individual attention and the chance to develop their own ideas and personality, things which institutionalisation can suppress. This, and contact with the volunteers from outside the home, will hopefully make it easier for the children to adjust to life outside the institution when they leave after finishing school.



### Case study: Cookery

Most children living outside institutions have an opportunity to learn basic cookery skills from their parents. However, learning to cook is an opportunity that the children at Balvan lack because all of the meals are produced by the canteen. The objective of the Cookery Club, therefore, is to offer the children a fun activity that will also provide them with a practical skill for when they leave the home. Among other things, the children have learned how to cook a healthy repertoire of savoury dishes including bean soup, pork soup, moussaka, 'Stephanie' roll with mushroom sauce, stuffed vine leaves and macaroni casserole, all of which the children can eat after they have cooked it. The club has been run by various staff members at the home over the past few years and attracts 5 children regularly. The club mainly appeals to older children and so gives them a creative outlet other than arts and crafts which appeal more to the younger children. What is more, cooking together develops important team-work skills, while eating together in a small group has a more familial atmosphere than eating with 30 other children and comes with the satisfaction that what they are eating is all their own work.

### Volunteer Trips

In 2013-2014...

- **36** UK student volunteers were recruited and trained by OXAB, with 22 travelling to Bulgaria, 12 to Bosnia and 4 to Albania.
- The **seventh** annual Balkan 5 meeting was hosted in November 2013, enabling representatives from OXAB and our partners at Imperial and Birmingham to meet and share experiences.

### Bosnia

OXAB have been organising aid to refugees in and around Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) ever since the war in the early 1990s, and unlike many other charities which have moved on to more recent flashpoints, we continue to help children in the area who still live in impoverished conditions. OXAB provides volunteers to run sessions in the community centre (Otvoreni Centar) in Hrasnica, a suburb of Sarajevo, which is the only place in the town for young people and children to spend their free time without being on the streets. Through a combination of educational and recreational activities for children the centre is able to provide Art, English and IT classes, as well as health advice for the prevention of alcohol and drug abuse.



(Above) OXAB volunteers and children at Otvoreni Centar

In total, 12 OXAB volunteers helped out at the centre over the Easter and summer holidays, organising a range of activities including teaching children English through games and activities, arts and craft, and sport. Popular craft projects were making masks, picture frames and bracelets, as well as games such as hide-and-seek and charades.

## Bulgaria

Bulgaria remains OXAB's most popular volunteering project, attracting the biggest cohort of student volunteers out of the three countries in which we work. In total, 22 OXAB volunteers travelled out to five centres, organising a range of activities and games whilst interacting with the children on a daily basis. Volunteers worked at orphanages in Balvan and Veliko Tarnovo, a girls crisis centre in Balvan, as well as a centre for disabled children and recently opened family centre in Gorna Oryahovitsa. All of these centres face very different challenges, and the volunteers had to come up with a unique programme of activities to suit the participants they were working with. This included arts and crafts activities, games such as 'what's the time Mr Wolf?' and 'Duck Duck Goose' and more structured English teaching for the older youth.

The children found the visits stimulating and enjoyable, whilst staff commented that the attention the volunteers provided helped to motivate the children, increase self-confidence and inspire new interests and skills. The volunteering projects were also an important experience for the student volunteers as they learnt new things from the children and staff, as well as from the immersion in Bulgarian culture.

"I found my time volunteering at the orphanage in Veliko Tarnovo very rewarding, particularly getting to know the children individually and learning which activities each of them enjoyed. I felt that even in the short time we were there we made a noticeable and positive difference in terms of developing skills such as sharing and I was very sad to leave them at the end."

*Sarah, Bulgaria volunteer*



(Above) OXAB volunteers with children at the Albania summer camp in Marqinet

## Albania

Every year, the Swedish NGO TAMAM runs a summer camp in the village of Marqinet on the outskirts of Tirana to enrich the educational and recreational opportunities for children in the local community. TAMAM have been involved with the community since 2008 when a chain of explosions at a military depot only metres away from the village wreaked havoc upon the lives of more than 6,000 people. Following this short-term disaster, TAMAM realised that long-term support was needed for the children of Marqinet, and thus a long term project was initiated in collaboration with students from the University of Tirana with an aim to integrate marginalised youth into Albania's broader socio-economic and political spheres of life.

The 2013 camp took place between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> July, with over 80 children in attendance (ages 4-17 years old). In total, over 20 volunteers were involved in the programme, including 4 OXAB volunteers. They were joined by volunteers from Sweden, Denmark, Korea, the US and Albania which allowed for a great deal of cross-cultural exchange, reflecting on TAMAM's motto; 'friendship without borders'. The summer camp provided much-needed recreational time for children who still suffer under harsh socio-economic conditions and encouraged outlets for creativity and post traumatic stress.



OXAB volunteers organised 6-8 hours of activities per day for the children in the village including arts and crafts sessions, English courses, sports activities and special excursions. The camp concluded with an end of camp 'festival' whereby the local community was invited to a showcase of everything the children had undertaken over the course of the camp. This included break-dance and musical performances, a play, art exhibitions and a 'mini-Olympics'.

## **Other Activities**

### ***Staff training/supervision***

For the first time in 2013-2014, OXAB began to provide specialised training and support to the staff in the homes we work with in Bulgaria. Working in a children's home is not an easy job – the children's behaviour can be challenging and it can be difficult to provide sufficient care and attention to so many young people at once. In addition, the staff receive low pay and little training to support them with the challenges they face. In conjunction with SOS Bulgaria, OXAB 2006 provided training on behaviour management, organising group activities and teamwork. The training was very popular with the staff and we hope to be able to build on this success in the future.

#### **Case Study: Staff Training**

The staff at the family centre learned how the whole home (staff and children) behaves like an organism. If one part of the organism is experiencing difficulties, the whole organism suffers. As a result of the training, they set up short daily meetings just before the children's bedtime when the children could share their impressions and experiences for the day and set tasks for the following day.

### **Christmas 2013**

OXAB works with two other local organisations, ZOV and Priateli, to organise annual Christmas parties for children living in homes around Veliko Turnovo. Christmas 2013 became our biggest celebration yet with two different Christmas parties for two different age groups, involving around 80 children from four different children's homes.

The older children and teenagers met in a disco-club in the centre of Veliko Turnovo which had been hired for the afternoon. They performed songs and dances that they had rehearsed before dancing to disco music and having snacks and soft drinks. Father Christmas and his assistants brought individual presents that the teenagers had asked for. At the same time as this party, the younger children met in a pizza restaurant with an attached play-area elsewhere in Veliko Turnovo. They had lots of fun playing with toys and the ball pool before Father Christmas visited to distribute presents of cars and dolls. After receiving their gifts, the children enjoyed pizza and juice in the restaurant. None of them had ever been to a restaurant before but their behaviour was impeccable, and it was a great end to the celebration.

Although the individual children’s homes make Christmas Day special for those who are there, the children look forward to the OXAB parties as an opportunity to celebrate with their friends from other children’s homes as well as enjoy rare treats such as pizza, dancing and Presents. Performing in front of their peers also provides an occasion for the children to work towards and an outlet for their creativity, and the staff and volunteers at the parties were certainly impressed by what the children could do!



“This party is a great example of collaboration between institutions, students and organizations. The local social services even asked us for photos and they will report the event to the National Children’s Network as good practice between NGOs and local authorities.”

*Katia, OXAB 2006*

**Gifts from Father Christmas**

(Top Right) Young child receiving a gift from Father Christmas  
 (Bottom Left) Older girl from Family-Style Home

**Donations**

In addition to the long-term projects and volunteering that are at the heart of OXAB’s work, in 2013-14 we also made two donations through our partner organisation OXAB 2006.

The first of these donations was a contribution to the transport which enabled children from Penyo and Maria Velkovi Home in Veliko Turnovo to go on their annual summer camp on the Black Sea coast. Without OXAB’s support, the home would not have been able to afford to take all of the children. Both staff and children were very appreciative and the summer camp was a great success.

The second donation was an emergency response to a fire at the Children’s Home in Balvan in January 2014. Thankfully nobody was hurt, but there was extensive damage to the first floor of the building which meant that the children’s bedrooms were inaccessible and they were sleeping on mattresses in the communal areas on the top floor. Unfortunately the insurance company would not pay for damages as the fire had been started accidentally by a child. The Veliko Turnovo municipality paid for the majority of costs, but small donations from OXAB and other local charities helped to cover the shortfall.

## Contributors

Many people contributed to OXAB's work in 2013-14 through in-kind and monetary donations, or by providing technical support and assistance. Every contribution, however small, makes an important difference, and we are very grateful to all our supporters across the UK, Bulgaria and further afield.

For their donations in kind, we would like to thank members of the Loving Hands knitting group, especially Hilary and Barbara, who knitted a huge number of beautiful jumpers, scarves and hats for all the children at the Home in Balvan. Each child received their own set of clothes at Christmas time, helping to keep them warm through the cold winter. Thanks also to Dom for a generous donation of hair clips and accessories – these were shared between three homes and were very popular with the girls. Special thanks go to all the OXAB volunteers who bought craft and sports materials for the homes where they volunteered, especially Lili, who organised a donation of 30 pairs of winter shoes for children from Penyo and Maria Home to replace the spring shoes or damaged shoes that the children had been wearing. We are also grateful to the Real English School, Veliko Turnovo, for providing us with an English teacher for the Balvan Children's Club at cost price, and to both Real English and ABC English for offering our student interns substantially discounted English tuition.

For their advice and support over the past year, we would like to thank Jennifer Stockill, Christopher McNall and Mark Brough. Jennifer provided valuable advice and support as we transitioned to a more professional style of management, Christopher, one of OXAB's founding members, continued to provide pro bono legal advice, and Mark has responded promptly to all our IT enquiries.

*"Thank you for setting aside some of your money so that I also have money, thank you for going without something every month so that you can send money to me. Life is not easy and I'm sure it isn't for you either, so I really value the fact that you go without for me."*

**Kristian, OXAB intern**

Many people gave financial support to OXAB's long-term projects in 2013-14, and we are grateful to our regular donors as well as everyone who responded to our Christmas fundraising appeal. Special thanks go to Friends of Bulgaria, ZOV UK, InterVol and the Dragon School, as well as the University of Oxford colleges of Keble, Lady Margaret Hall, Mansfield and St Hugh's. Last but not least, very little of what OXAB has achieved would have been possible without our friends and family, who have provided a huge amount of financial, practical and moral support since OXAB began. Thank you.



(Above) Children from Balvan Home wearing their new winter jumpers, hats and scarves and hairclips

## Volunteers and Staff

OXAB is run by two teams of volunteers who give their time, skills and enthusiasm to make our work possible. OXAB's board of trustees is made up of representatives of each of these teams and meets regularly to discuss the charity's overall direction and management.

OXAB began as a student organisation and still has a vibrant student committee based at the University of Oxford. The committee is comprised of a mix of undergraduates and postgraduates all studying different courses at a range of colleges across the university. Together they take responsibility for all student volunteer programmes in Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania, as well as increasing knowledge and awareness of the Balkans among the student population. This includes recruiting volunteers and organising fundraisers, as well as coordinating trip logistics and volunteer training. During 2013-14, the student committee was led by Lucy Long (President), and supported by Zhi Hao Tan (Treasurer), Dunja Janjic (Secretary), Sijana Mamos (Bulgaria Representative), David Vigoureux (Bosnia Representative), Jonathan Mayo (Albania Representative) and Madeleine Norman (Fundraising and Social Secretary). The trips that volunteers undertake are important not just for the youth at the centres we work with in the Balkans, but for the students themselves and the committee feels privileged to help facilitate this.

In addition to the student committee, OXAB has a small team of long-standing volunteers who support and co-ordinate everything connected to our long-term projects in Bulgaria. Chloe Blackmore and Joanna Flint were two of OXAB's first volunteers to visit the Balvan Children's Home in 2004, and their experiences of working with the children there brought home to them the need for more long-term support to complement OXAB's existing short-term volunteer trips. Working together with Bulgarian colleagues Katia Zlatkova and Steliyana Dulkova, Chloe and Joanna began to fundraise and brainstorm ideas for OXAB's first long-term projects. Joined in 2011 by Morgan James, a teacher and NGO worker who volunteered at the Balvan Saturday Club from 2009-11, they are still very much involved in supporting OXAB's local project co-ordinators. Between them they have knowledge of education, international development and human rights and experience of teaching, project co-ordination, admin, research and evaluation which they bring to their work with OXAB. Chloe, Morgan and Joanna feel privileged to have watched many of the children in Balvan grow up and leave the home with much brighter prospects than they would have had ten years ago and are excited about the opportunities that the next year will bring.



(Above) Chloe (far left), Morgan (second to left) and Joanna (right) with two of OXAB's student interns, Gosho and Valio.

OXAB's long-term projects in Veliko Turnovo are managed by OXAB 2006, our Bulgarian-registered partner organisation. OXAB 2006 employs four part-time staff members, Katia Zlatkova, Natalia Petkova, Dessi Popova and Maya Bo, who have skills and experience in the areas of social work, psychology, education, project management and media. Led by the OXAB 2006 president, Katia, the team have developed close relationships with the children and staff at all the local children's homes, as well as the local child protection services, and are excellently placed to lead OXAB's social and educational projects. The team are supported by an accountant, Mitko, translator, Steliyana, and are grateful for the help and support of the local university and social services.

## Looking forward to 2014-15

As well as continuing our current projects and volunteering programmes, as we move into 2014 – 2015 there are some wider changes afoot and much to celebrate and be excited about.

First, thanks to a generous donation we are able to support our main partner, OXAB 2006 in Bulgaria, to become more independent. Over the next two years, they will have the funds to employ the equivalent of a full-time co-ordinator, and begin to explore funding opportunities at the national level within Bulgaria. This will enable OXAB Bulgaria to take more control of the programmes in Bulgaria and give them a degree of stability to be able to develop the organisation in the way that best suits local needs. This does not mean we are withdrawing our financial support for the projects in the short-term; however, we hope this is the first step to ensuring long-term sustainability in Bulgaria.



Second, new for 2014, the Children's Club will be expanding to work with the Crisis Centre in Balvan. This is a state-run shelter which provides a refuge for girls rescued from abuse and trafficking, who typically spend a few months to a year at the centre before moving to a nearby children's home, into foster care or being reintegrated with their families. OXAB is planning to run regular dance, drama and craft activities as well as one or more excursions per year. The aim is to provide an outlet for the troubles they have experienced, and, in the long-term, will hopefully play a part in giving the girls the strength to be more assertive and independent.



**(Above)** Trip to Gabrovo for girls from the Crisis Centre

Finally, OXAB UK is also branching out to work with refugee groups within Bulgaria, which will involve developing relationships with new partner organisations. In summer 2014, OXAB volunteers will have the opportunity to work with small groups of Syrian children in Pazardjik and Sofia. With escalating conflicts in Syria, Gaza and Iraq, this programme is close to many people's hearts and is proving very popular with volunteers, especially post-graduate students with experience working with refugees. It also signifies a return to OXAB's roots, as our organisation was originally set up to support refugees in the former Yugoslavia. Over the coming year, OXAB plans to develop our volunteer training programme in order to fully prepare and support volunteers for the work they will be doing.

## How to help

OXAB is a small organisation made up of volunteers, supporters and donors who really do make a difference. One of these people could be you. There are a variety of different options available, depending on your skills, time availability and resources, so please do get in touch: [balvan@oxab.org.uk](mailto:balvan@oxab.org.uk).

### Share

It takes just two minutes to join our mailing list and become part of a community of supporters that receives our twice-yearly newsletter with updates and photos from our projects. We also have an active facebook group: Oxford Aid to the Balkans – OXAB.

### Volunteer

OXAB is powered by volunteers. Some of these are on the front-line, working directly with our partner organisations in the Balkans to organise fun and educational activities for disadvantaged children. Others work behind the scenes, finding funding opportunities, connecting with donors, supporting local co-ordinators and raising awareness. All of these are vital to our work. We are especially looking for professionals with skills in grantwriting, financial management and strategic planning who could volunteer a small amount of time to support our team. As a small charity, we also offer excellent opportunities to students looking to get involved in international development, especially those studying at the University of Oxford, Imperial College London or Birmingham University.



### Fundraise

Fundraising is a great way to raise awareness and funds for issues that matter to you. Could you do a sponsored walk or run, organise a cake sale or another event for OXAB? We can provide information and photos about the project you would like to fundraise for, the assurance that the money you raise goes directly to help children in need, and updates on how you have made a difference.



(Above) Volunteering in Albania and a cake sale at Wadham College

### Donate

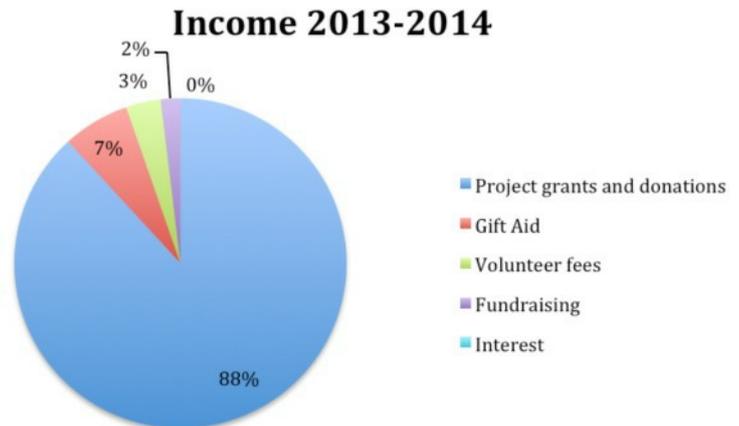
Almost 90% of OXAB's income comes from individuals who care, and without you, OXAB would not exist. Whether you want to make a one-off donation to a specific project, set up a regular direct debit or sponsor a young care-leaver to attend university, your donation will make a difference to the lives of disadvantaged children in the Balkans. As a small, volunteer-run charity, we strive to keep our running costs as low as possible, meaning that 95p of every £1 that you donate goes directly to the projects that we support. We provide donation receipts and if you are a UK tax payer we are able to claim an extra 25p gift aid on every £1 that you donate, at no extra cost to you.

## Financial Statements

In 2013-2014, OXAB's income was below the Charity Commission's threshold which would require independent examination.

**Total income: £24,079.66**

| Income                | Amount (GBP)      |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Grants and donations  | £21,236.80        |
| Gift aid              | £1,565.73         |
| Volunteer fees        | £820.00           |
| Fundraising campaigns | £455.05           |
| Interest              | £2.08             |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>£24,079.66</b> |



Of this, 92% is restricted income and can only be used for specific projects. 8% is unrestricted.

We have also received £67.39 in donated expenses and an impressive estimated 4,154 volunteer hours, which is roughly equivalent to two full-time members of staff.

**Total expenditure: £12,424.18**

| Outgoings              | Amount (GBP)      |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| Mentoring              | £5,470.43         |
| Internships            | £3,299.45         |
| Volunteer coordination | £1,247.73         |
| Children's Club        | £832.13           |
| Running costs          | £637.36           |
| Donations              | £540.09           |
| Christmas              | £396.99           |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>£12,424.18</b> |

