

American International School of Budapest Salonta Orphanage

In this example, note how the program began as more “community service” with students in a co-curricular situation, the National Honor Society. Their initial intention grew into a longer term commitment. However the “service learning” classroom connection occurs with the younger students, the third grade. This is part of the beauty of service learning: academic connections are ever present and when we find these the meaningful service has deep and rich academic possibilities to strengthen knowledge and skill through personal experience.

Comments from Cathryn Berger Kaye

It all started in September 2007 at a National Honor Society executive meeting. We were discussing our goals for the year. Our first goal was to reach out to the local community and we added “and beyond.”

For a couple of years we had tried to identify the “beyond”: we decided that it had to be a place that we could easily reach (that we could drive to within a few hours), a place where there was a need, and a project that included children. We then heard that a family from our school was sponsoring an orphanage for children from three to seventeen year old in Salonta, Romania near the Hungarian border.

Salonta no longer needed the military barracks dating from the Austro-Hungarian times, and had offered the use of the absolutely dilapidated buildings to a small orphanage that was operating in the centre of the city in a house. The AISB family came by chance in touch with the orphanage and started the renovation of the buildings.

Initiated by the NHS, a group of High School students participated in a first trip to Salonta in March 2008. We inquired about the needs of the children and as they had to walk to the “old orphanage” for their meals, we did a bike, clothes, and shoe drive. When we went in March we were able to offer a bike to all the older kids who could ride it to the city. We left Budapest on Friday and spent the night at the orphanage and the whole Saturday arranging the grounds, and playing with the kids. We went back for the senior service trip, stayed four days, had the kids teach us folk dances, folk art and we built a sandbox and took the kids out for pizza dinner and on an excursion to the “Bear Cave.”

When the third grade students were studying about rights and responsibilities, they decided to contribute to the project with the funds of their annual Flea market to purchase playground equipment for the orphanage. On the next trip in March we set up the playground equipment. The project had become a community builder with students, parents, and teachers involved to make the life of others better.