



# Spring Newsletter 2019

*For God so loved the world, that he sent his only son, that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life" John 3 v 16*

From the Trustees,

In 2019 we are celebrating the 20th Anniversary of A2B. During that time we have been able to help thousands of people because of your faithful partnership with families in Albania through your giving and prayers. The importance of this work is summed up for me in a quote from one of the family link families: "Our life would never have changed if A2B had not helped us. You have helped my children get an education... without your help we would continue to live as beggars. Thank you for all your love". You make a difference. Thank you.

Andrew, David, Nicola, Paul, Sam and Tracy (Trustees, A2B UK)

## A2B is 20 years Old

Paul Heffer, Trustee

It was in February 1999 that an urgent call was made from Albania to the UK to help support thousands of Kosovan Albanian refugees who had fled to escape ethnic cleansing.

The previous year Chris and Roy Debenham had sold their business and moved to Elbasan in Albania to run an orphanage. They called to say they were supporting a thousand refugees who had walked along the railway line into the city. Money was urgently needed for warm clothes and food. A group of friends in Suffolk got together and formed a charity. "Aid to The Balkans Forward Trust" was born.



UN Photo, 1999

At the time, all I knew about Albania was what I had seen on the news. My first involvement was to organise a concert to raise funds, staged at Bury St Edmunds Cathedral. We managed to raise awareness of the situation and lots of money. The local paper sent a journalist to Elbasan to report on the work being done by Chris and Roy.

When the refugees returned Chris and Roy continued the charity by opening a soup kitchen to support the widows and orphans left behind after the war. My wife Jill visited Kosovo in 2000, and the year after I returned with her. I was saddened to see the devastation in the country and the number of people needing help. We visited many of the beautifully decorated graves of those who had been killed and I was shocked by the hatred of one group of human beings against another. Whilst there we were asked to attend a meeting at the United Nations building in Pristina. They were impressed with the work that A2B were doing and initially offered to purchase food for the project. After a short while they decided to take over the whole project and Chris and Roy headed back to Elbasan.

They then suggested that the charity should continue as due to the political and economic situation in Albania there were many people living in extreme poverty. The trustees agreed and I joined them in 2001. My first visit to Elbasan was to visit Chris and Roy and to see for myself the great need of families living there. The family link programme was set up and the trustees set about finding sponsors. The rest has been a long and exciting story, seeing the faithfulness of God first-hand. Within a short time we had met Alketa and Elona who now head up the work in Albania and it is their vision and faith that has enabled the work of A2B to grow and prosper.

Chris and Roy are now happily retired and Chris still joins our monthly Albania prayer meetings. I continue to be an active trustee and visit Albania regularly. I'm amazed at the wonderful work that A2B is doing. It touches the lives of so many people and it has been a privilege to play a part and see the difference it has made.

Most of all it has been faith-building, I can see the hand of God in every part of A2B and it is to Him that we must be thankful. As for the future? God knows! All those involved in A2B both in the UK and Albania will continue be open to what He has to say, please pray for us to hear His voice.

## Thank You John

Paul Heffer, Trustee

In January the Trustees met for our annual day together and this was sadly the last meeting for John Selley. John was one of the original trustees, a previous chair of the organisation, and served A2B for just under twenty years.

John never visited Albania but his heart was always for its people and those that we support. We will miss his wisdom, his wit and his life stories which kept us entertained through many a Trustees' meeting. The Trustees, on behalf of all those John has impacted, would like to thank John for his dedication and service. We pray God's blessing on everything that he does in the future.



*From left to right: Sam Whitmarsh, Paul Heffer, Andrew Davies, David Ayrton, Nicola Davies, John Selley, Tracy Bishop*

## Sponsored Walk

Nicola Davies, Trustee



I am planning a sponsored walk to raise funds for A2B on Saturday 18th May. The route is approximately a 10 mile circular walk starting and finishing at Long Melford, taking in Lavenham for lunch.

More details to follow. Please spread the word amongst family and friends

Contact [nicola.davies@a2balbania.org](mailto:nicola.davies@a2balbania.org) for more info.

## Food Bank Albania

Sam Whitmarsh, Chair

A2B help coordinate Foodbank Albania in the Elbasan region. In December 2018 we launched the "Winter Project" which lasted until March 2019. The project has connected with up to 75 families and share food packages with them all. These families were referred to the Food Bank by the regional Social Services Office and live in the villages surrounding Elbasan, including families in Peqin. December 2018 saw a large donation of potatoes! These potatoes were distributed through the foodbank families, A2B Day Centres and other local charities.



## A Family for Me

Sam Whitmarsh, Chair

A2B has launched a new pilot project called "a family for me" in the area of foster care, which is almost unknown in Albania. The project will launch in Tirana—the capital city of Albania funded by SOS village which has won grants from the European Union. This is a new direction for both A2B and state child care policy in Albania. Please pray for clear direction and for the children and families that will form part of the project.

# Lives Turned Around

Tracy Bishop, A2B Trustee

The Family Link Programme supports families in a variety of ways. They may receive a food parcel each month, help with rent or medical expenses along with the assistance of A2B staff and wider programmes encouraging and advocating for them. We would like to share two stories where families' lives have been turned around and they are now in a position to support themselves.

## The Osmani Family. Mother and Daughter.



Mrs Osmani suffered from depression following trauma from an abusive relationship. Her extended family were trying to help but their own poverty limited the difference they could make. The family were rejected by the people in her village due to their circumstances.

A2B became involved in 2015 and have been able to support the mother through her divorce proceedings. We have provided monthly food parcels and helped them to purchase the medication they needed. Through much prayer, practical advice and engagement with wider A2B projects, the family are now safe in their home, the daughter attends an A2B kindergarten and Mrs Osmani has a job which she is very proud of and she feels she has peace and joy. The family say – “A2B Albania you are wonderful. To say Thank You seems an insufficient way to show our gratitude. You have helped us to totally change our lives. Thank You so much. X”

## The Duja Family. Mother, Two sons and a daughter

A2B began supporting this family three years ago. The mother had no job, the children were not in school and the eldest child (9) spent his time collecting cans from rubbish piles to help support the family. The mum and her youngest son would beg. The house they lived in was in a poor condition and surrounded by rubbish.

Through your support and prayers, the children are now attending school and gaining excellent results. Their teachers comment on their positive behaviour. The youngest attends an A2B kindergarten and is very friendly. The family live in accommodation which is clean and warm. Mrs Duja has a part-time job caring for an elderly lady and is applying for a caring job in Italy. A2B are helping with the documentation.

The family say - “Our life would never have changed if A2B Albania had not helped us. They have helped my children get an education and I have been helped by attending the positive parenting sessions. Without your help we would continue to live as beggars. Thank you for all your love and unconditional support.”



These are just two examples where A2B have been able to help families to a better life. There are so many more families that A2B have helped as well as families we are currently supporting. Due to the difficult circumstances in Albania we are constantly finding families who need support. If you would like to sponsor or part sponsor a family or would like to know more about the Family Link Programme then please feel free to contact me for more information.

Tracy Bishop Family Link Coordinator. Email – [tracy.bishop@a2balbania.org.uk](mailto:tracy.bishop@a2balbania.org.uk)

## Provision for Peqin

Sam Whitmarsh, A2B Chair

The Peqin project is a story of God's amazing provision. The project has had its fair share of challenges. A break occurred in January 2018 in where food and learning materials were stolen, and funding ran out in December 2018. Many of you have been praying for Peqin. It's amazing to be able to report that God is working through your prayers. A vision was shared with the trustees of an enlarged day centre, expanded from the current building, serving the community with a café and safe space for children to do their homework. In the middle of a funding crisis, expansion was definitely not top of our list. Amazingly, God has provided even more than we could have imagined...



The Church in Peqin, in partnership with a Church in Germany, has purchased the day centre building and will provide it to A2B rent free! We are even having conversations about how we might extend the building and bring the vision into reality. A church in Sweden have offered to pay the wages for one of the teachers and individuals and businesses in the UK have stepped up and followed God's voice providing further funding. We are not yet at a sustainable funding level but God is so good. Give thanks that God is working in such a powerful way, give thanks for His Church around the world working as His hands and feet. Pray that God would bring long term and sustainable funding for the project. Most of all, please pray for the children and community of Peqin, that they would feel God's love and be blessed through this project.

## Leave A2B a Gift in your Will

Andrew Davies A2B Trustee

Our work is funded by supporters in a range of different ways. One method can be by leaving a gift in your Will. If you have supported A2B by donating or attending one of our events, a gift in your Will allows you to continue that support when you are no longer here to assist us in person. And it's tax free – which in some circumstances may reduce the amount of inheritance tax you need to pay.

Making a legacy to us is easy. You can include us in a new Will, or you can add a Codicil to an existing one (we recommend this is done through a Solicitor). None of us lives forever here on earth, but a legacy gift ensures that your wealth can continue to help people beyond your own lifetime. So do please think of us when you are arranging your personal affairs. Legacy gifts, regardless of size, allow A2B to help someone who really needs support and will make a difference. Thanks.



## Giveasyoulive

David Ayrton, A2B Treasurer

Treat us when you treat your loved ones or buy groceries with the GiveasyouLive gift card. It can be spent in-store and online at over 100 high-street stores and you'll raise ££ for us when you buy. Get more information from: <https://instore.giveasyoulive.com/buy-gift-cards/give-as-you-live-card>

# A2B

Lifting Dignity,  
Restoring Hope

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