



## PRESS RELEASE

### Hope for Bulgaria's Abandoned Children

**UK charity's new programme helps Bulgarians stop orphanage leavers being forced into prostitution, human trafficking and abuse**

*'It is too late to help many of the children incarcerated in [Bulgarian state] institutions - their lives are already irreparably damaged.'*

- Rosa Monckton, *The Times*

For the thousands of children currently in state-care in Bulgaria, Rosa Monckton's words paint a depressing picture of their future. UK charity The Trussell Trust's new 'House of Opportunity Programme' is already proving that it is possible to give young people leaving state-care a normal future free from crime, prostitution and drug abuse.

This innovative programme gives care leavers life skills training, employment opportunities and a place in small, family-style home. Residents completing the pilot two-year project have jobs, can cook and are attending evening college. The Trussell Trust is now working with Bulgarians to reform post-18 care by rolling out these residential training centres right across the country.

The need for change is urgent: Currently, at age 18 'the children incarcerated in institutions' are forced to leave. Most leave with no money, no family support, no home, no job and no hope. In order to survive, girls and boys alike are often forced into prostitution, sold into human trafficking or return to the desperately poor and often abusive communities they first came from.

This year hundreds more young people will leave orphanages and be forced to enter a life of cruelty, poverty and abuse. Their potential for leading a normal life will ebb away and they will become part of the cycle of poverty that sees so many children abandoned in the first place.

Now is the time to act to stop this. We need to raise awareness of the plight of these forgotten young people. We need to work with Bulgarians to see radical change. We need to give these damaged young people a chance.

## Notes to the editor:

- Rosa Monckton recently re-opened UK media interest in the conditions of Bulgaria's state institutions in The Times (13<sup>th</sup> February 2009) and on Radio 4's Woman's Hour (3<sup>rd</sup> March 2009), after visiting more orphanages displaying horrendous conditions. This followed on from a BBC documentary by Kate Blewett about the state of Bulgaria's institutions in 2007, invoking disgust at the treatment of 'Bulgaria's Abandoned Children' <http://www.tbact.org/public/documents/Statement%20from%20Kate%20Blewett%20-%209th%20November%202007.doc>.
- Many international observers and press criticise Bulgaria because of the conditions there, particularly with regard to abandoned and orphaned children. Conditions are often poor in Bulgaria and there is a desperate need for change, however, these programmes rarely acknowledge that there are also Bulgarians who understand this need for change but lack the capacity or capability to make it reality. We are empowering Bulgarians to make social change and fight poverty by sharing with them some of the advantages that we have in the UK - especially in terms of skills, training and funds.
- The Trussell Trust is a UK NGO working in the UK and Bulgaria. In Bulgaria we launch community projects, working with Bulgarians who want to combat poverty and change their communities. We regularly send members of our team from the UK to Bulgaria to oversee projects, provide training and help with funding. We also take UK professionals to Bulgaria, often as volunteers, to share their expertise with our Bulgarian team. We aim to empower the Bulgarians who are running our projects day-to-day with the skills and tools they need to make lasting change, helping break cycles of poverty.
- The majority of children in state care in Bulgaria are of Roma origin. Roma people are marginalized in Bulgaria, often making it difficult for them to gain employment. The House of Opportunity Programme works with local Bulgarian employers to secure paid work placements for residents of the Programme.
- The House of Opportunity will help prevent children from being abandoned to state institutions in the future, by giving these young parents of the future the chance to earn the money they need to care for their own children.
- Official Bulgarian government statistics show that between 2001-2005, only eight young people who left state care went into paid employment.
- The Trussell Trust is empowering Bulgarians to help those in their own community.

- The Trussell Trust want the Bulgarian state to see and understand that through the House of Opportunity there is a way to help reduce the rate of abandoned children, reduce the prostitution of young people, reduce the crime rate and increase the number of young people who have a chance to be good citizens.
- The Trussell Trust was founded 12 years ago to work with marginalised people in the UK and in Bulgaria. In the UK we run the Salisbury **foodbank**, supplying food boxes to those in crisis locally. Our **foodbank** network provides training and resources to those wishing to start their own **foodbank** nationwide; over 30 Trussell Trust **foodbanks** are now launched across the UK. Our social enterprise project focuses on developing cohesion, creativity and inclusion in the local community whilst also generating funds. In Bulgaria we run residential training centres for state care leavers and we introduce sustainable projects to marginalised Roma gypsy communities. We also support Lipnitsa School, running respite camps, improving infrastructure and giving Christmas boxes.

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