

*We have received this message from Sarah Peters as she is now back in Romania and it is reproduced here in full:*

Well, I'd like to try to tell you about what I'm doing here in Romania. Every day or week can look quite different, sometimes we don't know quite what to expect, and plans often change at the last minute. But, there are some steady factors too I can try to summarise.

I am currently a part of the Maternal Care Team with Networks Romania, an organisation which works to provide holistic and relational support across 3 Roma communities in Arad, in Western Romania. The organisation aims to empower, educate, and provide crisis help and employment through various enterprises, including Dece clothing company (<https://dececlothing.com/>).

As part of a much wider team of people, who are seeking to grow in faith and walk out together the practical teachings of Jesus, the Maternal Care Team currently consists of Rodi, a Roma woman trained as a nurse, Ellen, a trainee midwife from Finland, and me with a background in child development.

Our heart and vision is to support women and young children in the Roma communities, who are commonly at a disadvantage in terms of their access to healthcare, whether it be due to lack of knowledge, lack of resources, and/or discrimination. As such our team aims to support pregnant women from these communities, and their children up until 3 years old, to promote greater knowledge and access to necessary services to promote their wellbeing.

Typically, we spend one day a week in each community. This day looks different every week, but in each community in one month we have at least one trip with women to the maternity hospital for an ultrasound and/or analysis and follow-up; an education meeting split by age group of the child so we can tailor the education to be the most appropriate and beneficial; and a day for home visits, which is an opportunity to spend time with the families at home, build relationships and offer support and prayer for the families.

These past 3 months education topics have covered the process of labour; first aid for choking, burns and bleeds; dental care; mother and baby attachment; and basic information on child diseases. In each community and with each group we teach it can look quite different, varying from 2 women in a group, to 22 women and their children in one group. As the Mums receive this education, we have toys at the side which the children can join one of the team, quite often I'll be here with the children, to play and encourage the child's language, social, emotional and educational development. Some of the children are still a bit shy and stay in their Mum's lap, others relish every moment they get to play and seemingly gain a lot from the encouragement to try some new things, and to believe that they can do these things, like fixing a jigsaw puzzle on their own.



For those in our programme we also support nutritional growth and development by providing the family each either with a food pack of dried beans, rice, pickles, fruit, tomato sauce and oil, or for those who have problems breastfeeding, we give a box of milk powder. This is only a small supplement to what the families provide themselves through a month.

It's such an honour and a privilege to be welcomed into these families' homes, and to journey with the women through motherhood. This month I got to hold in my arms the gorgeous little baby girl, who a few months ago I met in the first ultrasound I've ever experienced. That was a very special moment, and so beautiful to see Mum and baby doing well.

But all this becomes so much more meaningful through seeing what God is doing, how He orchestrates circumstances when we think we have a good plan, but He knows better. How He shows us a little more of His kingdom through the smile of a child, a woman's experience of healing or God's love, or even in seemingly heartbreaking situations where His hope and promises shine through in the midst of tears. Every day, in spending time with the families, with my colleagues, with God, I experience more and more of His love, grace, joy, peace, and experience awe and wonder at His ways beyond my understanding but that with such tenderness and intricacy reveal to me more of the greatness of His sovereignty, and an overwhelming love for the people and communities we walk alongside, and just such a sense of beauty that hits me every time I enter the dirt and mud filled tracks that lead to the communities and see the homes and faces of the strong and wonderful families who have taught me so much about gratitude, hospitality, serving, love, strength, persevering and so much more. There are challenges too, and constant questions that I'm still processing, but I'm learning through every experience and for that I'm grateful, and still feel encouraged that at least for now, this is exactly where I need to be.

Recently, we have been considering how our programme aligns with God's vision and are considering making some changes to the programme in order to best meet and best love and serve the women and babies, and best care for ourselves as a team, to not become overwhelmed. Please pray that we make the right decisions and continue to grow to reflect more of Him in all that we do.

This past month was also very exciting, with some additions to our regular schedule, and our team. Mum, Dad and Rachel came to visit for a week, and after a couple of days exploring Budapest, arrived in Arad and I quickly put them to work, helping to sort baby clothes donations we have, helping us in our monthly give out in one community, and entertaining the kids from the Creative Club in that community, with, of course, puppets! Since it was Easter, we also had the special privilege of preparing an extra give out, so that each family we work with received food for an Easter dinner, and shoebox gifts for each household, and each child. So, my family worked hard to help us one of the 4 days we had sorting through the many shoeboxes we received, to make sure each box was equally filled and each child and family received a good box. Then, the week before Easter, Romanian Orthodox Easter, which this year was a week after Easter in England, I had the privilege of helping to hand out these extra gifts, and have since seen on visits with families some of these shoebox items in use. Having for many years made shoeboxes that were sent to Romania, it was very special to this time be a part of them being received by families. And it was lovely to enjoy time with my family, and for them to experience and share in a little bit of my life here, I'm very grateful for their visit.

And I thank you for being a part of this journey with me too, I really appreciate all of your support.

With love,

Sarah Peters