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The Weekly News

My mission to help Romanian orphans

By Rosie Prebble

I MUST have wanted to help poor kids in Romania a lot- because I forced myself on a plane for the first time at 60 to do it!

I am 64 now, from Somerset, and I've worked as a Learning Support Assistant in a secondary school for 13 years.

When I reached 60, having brought my family up, I wanted to do something different.

I'd always been interested in Romania since the revolution there, and we all recall seeing the orphanages on the TV news.

I could never get those images out of my head, and then I came across an organisation called Projects Abroad.

I went out to Romania for three months, even though I'd never been on a plane before. Flying was wonderful, the take-off and landing just an adventure.

When I arrived, I did a six-week stint in a hospital, working with babies. Most of them were gypsies' babies, and they had been left there so people could take a break and someone else would have to feed them.

Then I had another six weeks in a foster home for kids with special needs, autism and things like that.

I spent time every day with each child, and I just fell in love with the children, the people, the country.

I've made so many friends from all over the world and had experiences I never had before, but somehow it just wouldn't have been the right time if I'd done this when I was younger.

To anyone else who is past retirement age and wonders what they could do with their time, I can definitely recommend doing something like this, because it's so fulfilling.

I have a whole new reason to live, which sounds silly because I have a family, two children, a granddaughter, and four step-children and four step-grandchildren!

But my husband died seven years ago and the kids are grown up, so having no real responsibilities means someone like me can go off and help somewhere.

I asked my own children what they thought,, and they said, "Go for it, Mum!"

Since my first visit, I've been back every year. I've even wondered about bringing a child to see Britain but, in the end, it seemed unfair, to show them the UK and then send them back.

It's wonderful when I go back, to see them waiting at the gate, shouting, "Rosie, Rosie!"

My next plan is to do a big fundraising event for an orphanage there, in Brasov, at the bottom of the Carpathian Mountains.

They used to have chickens, pigs and grow potatoes there, but the government found out and stopped their money because they were "self-sufficient"- that's the red tape they are up against.

So I have spoken to my local Euro MP, and he's promised to support me in this.

Romania are in the EU, and he gave me lots of interesting information.

Hopefully, I'll be able to put on a concert or something and raise money to get them a tractor and tools. These children can stay there until they're 26, so this is a long-term thing.

Also, the gypsies are treated terribly, so the little ones need all the help they can get.

Maybe a lot of people retire when they reach my age but, believe me- I'm just getting started!

As told to Craig Campbell