




# *Coming Home*

SUMMER 2003  
MALINI, ROMANIA



GAINDEH REPORT  
DIRECTOR LAURA SIMMS





For a second summer, The Gaindeh Project conducted Coming Home, a storytelling initiative for adolescent orphans, in the Moldavian village of Malini, Romania under the direction of Laura Simms. Through storytelling, story making, therapy, and arts activities we explored the world of imagery within ourselves, in the village, and in full color illustrations provided by The Magic Pencil Exhibition of the British Council in Bucharest.

## Summer 2003

For a week this July, as part of The Gaindeh Project's Coming Home initiative, ten orphans (from two Institutions), three village adolescents, four staff a Roma storyteller in training and two Roma children, were developing skills in storytelling to empower their lives with the capacity needed to envision and create a meaningful future, and feel worthwhile in the present. Every three children and one adult lived in a peasant house and participated in the daily demands of a sustainable agricultural community virtually unchanged for the last one hundred years. This living situation is offered to bring them a sense of pride in their own culture and the basic family structure that has sustained Romania – a structure none of them has found safe or welcoming.



## Project Description

The Coming Home process engenders immediate relief from depression and hopelessness, activates sustainable behavioral change, and develops needed life skills for adolescents to help them help themselves by helping others. The long-term goal of the project offers children, who have little self-confidence, or experience of care, the internal resources for building a successful vision of their lives so they can imagine an alternative to despair and isolation. Through the various activities of the project they access and strengthen their inherent capacities of imagination, self worth, resilience, kindness and communication. They leave knowing that they can be resourceful helpful citizens of a civil society capable of going out into the world on their own. The immediate function of the project is for the kids to become storytellers for younger children in their community or institution. They become the source of hope and happiness for others as part of their own healing.

## Staff and Partners

This summer our project was enhanced by The Magic Pencil illustrations, generously shared by the British Council of Romania and displayed in the Primaria in the village of Malini in Moldavia; as well as a small grant from Fundatio de Sprijin Comunitar in Bacau. FSC provided us with a Roma teacher/storyteller and two children as well as a donation to fund their housing and meals. We were accompanied by Vali Rancilor, actor/musician/therapist who has created a groundbreaking project in the mental institution in Gasteni for over two hundred patients, and Daniela Cornestean, therapist for the Joseph Foundation in Iasi who served as the translator for





Ms. Simms. Our staff also included one adult from each Institution, our driver and administrator Costanzu, and Roluca who has assisted Vali Rancilor in many projects with handicapped children in Botosani.

The use of The Magic Pencil imagery this summer became the touchstone and focus of key activities for the youth, the staff and the community of Malini. The addition of The Magic Pencil pictures increased our potential by giving the children a view of artwork and images they would not necessarily have access to. It was also heartening to see peasants, who have now welcomed the youth into their village, walking through the exhibit, knowing we had brought a bit of the larger world into Malini.

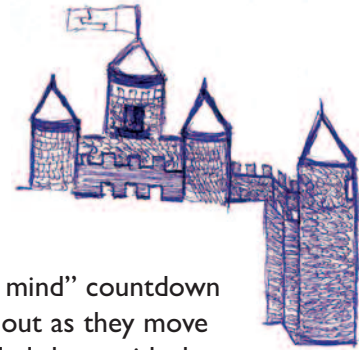
The following pages are descriptions of Activities that the children engaged in with the illustrations, guided by Laura Simms and her staff (Vali Rancilor and Daniela Cornestean). The use and exhibit of the illustrations, along with arts materials, was provided generously by the British Council in Bucharest.



## DAY ONE - PREPARATION

### A Feast of Listening

Before we visited the exhibition, in preparation, we spent a day in a large room in the Malini Elementary School overlooking a garden and a wandering bull. We spent our first hours playing theater games and setting the tone for the week to come: team building, trust building, and comfort building.



Basic exercises that would repeat daily were begun. The “resting the mind” countdown involved the kids listening to a determined series of numbers called out as they move from standing to lying down in slow motion. This simple form provided them with the satisfying and delightful challenge of being in the body and becoming aware of themselves and others in a noninvasive manner. We also began the first wish circles teaching the formal bow, and a series of listening activities that make up this potent ceremony of spontaneous language, shared images and offering gifts of wishes to each other.

Both activities provide the important elements of body-mind synchronization, and listening with focus and non-judgment to self and others. They set the tone for trust and group communication. The staff participates fully as well. There are few times when adults pay attention to these kids with concern and respect. These formal plays are reinforced and built on daily. They are fun, as well as landmarks of successful personal accomplishment involving getting to know others, feeling valuable, and finding meaning in the adventure of self-discovery.

The afternoon, after a sizeable break for lunch and rest, was based on listening to and exploring a single folktale. Outside, away from the view of the young bull, I told the tale of The Seven Sisters (text attached). Several elements of the story were similar to ideas and images that had been important the previous summer to the young people: abandoned children alone in the world; dependence on one another; rescuing a captured prince; confronting and overcoming a giant with tremendous power; becoming the best of themselves recognized by the kingdom; and reuniting with their parents.

We talked about the story, drew images from the story, made story maps, and chose our favorite characters to enact and create further stories. At the end of the afternoon, they retold the story to one another, including their own new tales.

Everyone returned to their host homes for large meals. We were in the village in the first days of rain after a summer of drought and our families were in the field from before dawn until sunset. This background of necessity framed our experience in the village.

# THE SEVEN SISTERS

Adapted by Laura Simms from:  
The Legend of BabaKhar Kash, the old grass seller



There was once a grass seller and his wife who had seven daughters. No matter how hard they worked there was never enough of anything for the entire family. One day, the foolish man said to his wife, "Tomorrow I will take our children to a place where nut trees grow thick and leave them alone. We cannot feed them any longer." Sadly, his wife agreed to the cruel plan.

The next day, the father took the girls to a dense thicket far from their home. He warned them to wait and not to look for him as he gathered nuts, "If you look at me, I will be turned into an animal," he said. Then, he climbed and leapt from tree to tree, until he left his daughters far behind him. He prayed as he walked that they would be spared.

As the sun went down and the grove grew dark, one of the girls, fearing that her father was lost, looked up. She saw a creature in the trees and began to weep, "I have caused our father to turn into an animal".

The seven girls held one another, saying, "We are lost and we are alone." Being strong-willed girls, they set off in the night. They vowed to help one another. "Together we can find food, and find our way home to help our poor mother." But they could not find their way home.

Before dawn, they came to an ancient fortress whose huge doors stood open. Seeking shelter, they went inside. They found themselves in a silent and empty stone castle. They walked from room to room until they came to a door that was shut and locked. On the lintel above the door was a key. The eldest daughter climbed on the back of one of her sisters, reached the key, and opened the door.

To their great astonishment, they saw a handsome young man wearing brocaded robes lying on the floor in the corner of the room. He stood up and greeted them, "Do not fear. I will not harm you. I am a prisoner. A giant owns this castle. Two times every day he comes to feed me. You must leave or you too will be caught. If I attempt to leave this room, he will kill us all."

The youngest daughter, whose heart beat wildly at the sight of the young man said, "Is there no way to save you?"

The prince answered, "The giant, who lives in the bottom of a dark well, takes his terrible power from a white bird that he has captured. Deep in the castle cellar is the well and deep in the well is an iron cage. In that cage is the white bird. If someone set the bird free, the giant could no longer do harm. But it is an impossible task. Three times I have tried and three times the giant in the well has stopped me." One of the sisters said, "Perhaps we seven sisters could find the well." The young man answered, "Do not risk your lives. The giant will find you. It is best if you leave me here. This is my miserable destiny."

The sisters insisted, "We will try our best. We have lost everything and have nothing more to lose." The prince shared his meal and wished them luck.

The seven sisters locked the massive doors, leaving the prince in the room, and went in search of the well. They climbed down stone steps after stone steps, deeper and deeper into the castle, until they came to the cellar where they found the well. It descended far into the earth. The dank wet smell of the water made them feel faint. But the youngest sister saw a rope. She urged her sisters, "We must pull up the rope with all of our strength." They pulled and pulled until they raised up an iron cage. Inside the cage was a beautiful white bird. Just as one sister was about to open the cage door, they heard a loud and terrifying sound coming from deep inside the well. It was the voice of the giant. "DO NOT OPEN THE CAGE."

Four sisters including the one who held the cage fell backwards in terror. The youngest sister caught the cage and pulled open the cage door. She reached in and took the white bird in her hands. Its heart beat with great power as she held it tightly. Again, the giant called out and this time the sound of his voice was so awful that two more sisters fell to the ground from fear. The youngest sister was so afraid that she held the bird in her hands even tighter and began to shake, not letting it loose.

The eldest sister called out to her, "Let the bird free." They heard a clanging resounding sound as the giant tried to rise up from the well. The youngest sister's hand seemed stuck to the bird. But the bird itself pecked at her fingers and, waking as if from a dream, she let the bird free. The youngest sister fell backwards onto her six sisters and they watched as the white bird circled higher and higher and flew away through a small high window.

As the bird vanished, the giant's hand reached up from the well. His voice was now pitiful, "Pull me up!" he cried. But, suddenly, the hand disappeared and the sound of the giant tumbling downward, into the dark waters beneath the castle, echoed until it was silent again.

The girls recovered their senses quickly, and rested against one another until their hearts were stilled. The only sound they heard was the cry of the bird calling in the distance as it flew to freedom. They rushed to the prince and set him free. He was overcome with gratitude and could not say a word. But his eyes met the eyes of the youngest sister and they fell in love.

They traveled together a long way to the Prince's Court in the city of Kabul. Everyone rejoiced at their arrival. The seven sisters were welcomed and given rooms in the castle. Soon, the youngest daughter of the grass seller and his wife became betrothed to the prince of Kabul. Before the wedding, the girls requested that their mother be brought from their village.

To their surprise, their father was still alive and came with their mother to Kabul. The true story was told and they forgave their parents their foolishness. Their parents wept for joy to be reunited with their children and said they had not rested a single day since the girls were abandoned. Regretting their action, the father had searched for them many times with no luck.

The entire city took part in the celebration and the sisters were honored. The grass seller and his wife were given a new home and they all lived in the Kingdom. It is said that once a year on the anniversary of the day that the white bird was freed, it flew over the city and rested in the royal gardens. Its joyful cry was heard by one and all in the beautiful city of Kabul.



## DAY TWO - FOCUS

We engaged in activities to encourage the children to pay attention; to find the inner impulse to relate to themselves, what is happening and their environment with wakeful interest. This begins with strengthening their ability to simply pay attention and take interest in seeing and experiencing a work of art for its aesthetic pleasure and the way in which meaning is enjoyed. The ability to rest the mind and focus on something is empowering. It sets the ground for seeing the world around you and appreciating the details. Having *The Magic Pencil* gave us a focus that was beautiful and fun. They were hung throughout the main entrance room of the Primaria, at eye level for the kids. We began by making a circle in the center of the room and looking at one another silently, without making eye contact: looking for detail and spending time getting to know the room. We repeated this; the second session spent looking to see what details were not seen the first time. Then we went around and talked about what was newly seen, just simply enjoying the surprise of discovery and the fun of seeing. Even at this early stage it was obvious that they were interested in their own ability to maintain focus and felt proud of what they had accomplished: seeing, remembering, sharing, enjoying.

After this, the kids were sent to walk around the room and asked to look at the pictures and choose one they really liked. When they found one they liked, they were to look at it in the same way we looked at the room. Then they were asked to come back and list on paper all that they remember seeing in their picture. Then, they went back and looked again to see if there was something they had not seen before. They took each other on a tour of the picture they had chosen, going in pairs, and clearly enjoyed themselves.

We ended the afternoon drawing images with the help of Michael, an actor attending the workshop through the British Council. Every child learned the magic of perspective and created their own tree.





## DAY THREE - SEEING

Having chosen a picture, each child then looked at one person or object in the picture and drew a picture of that object the best they could. This was not done as an art lesson, but for memory and enjoyment. Then they practiced making their bodies into that image. They showed each other and had to guess which picture they were in. There was a great flurry of fun and attention and excitement rushing to pictures and showing each other.

Vali then had them make group vignettes with their bodies. They could go to any picture and find a group of objects (animals, chairs, birds, leaves, the train) to become. We spent quite a bit of time doing this because it is important to engage physically in order to establish a depth of understanding and experience.

Since we had not seen the British Museum Magic Pencil video yet, and did not know the stories behind the illustrations, the kids were able to make up stories about what was going on in their picture. They chose one object to write about. Because they had spent time looking, pretending, and becoming, they had wonderful little tales. We later sat in a circle and shared our stories with one another.

### The Life Story of the Objects found inside the paintings of the British Council Exhibit of Illustrations, Malini, 2003

#### Julien

I AM A SNAKE. I LIVE MOSTLY IN THE WATERS.  
SINCE I WAS SMALL MY PARENTS TOLD ME NOT TO GO TO FAR AWAY,  
BUT ONE DAY I MADE A FRIEND AND WENT WALKING ON A JOURNEY.

I AM AFRAID OF PEOPLE. THAT IS WHAT SNAKES FEEL, BECAUSE PEOPLE ALSO  
FEEL AFRAID OF SNAKES AND AT THE SAME TIME THEY WANT TO KILL THEM.  
I AM A BIT LONELY... I LIKE TO BE LONELY.

#### Petronella

I AM A BALL.  
ONCE UPON A TIME, SOME BOYS BOUGHT ME SO THEY COULD PLAY WITH ME.  
THIS HAPPENED THREE YEARS AGO.  
THEY USED TO PLAY HARD AND HIT ME VERY HARD.  
I BROKE AND THEY THREW ME WHERE THE GARBAGE WAS. THEY WERE SORRY.  
AFTER THAT SOME OTHER BOYS TOOK ME AND REPAIRED ME.  
AFTER THAT I NEVER BROKE AGAIN.





## Michaela

I AM A CANDLE.  
FIVE YEARS AGO, THE OWNER OF A HOUSE BOUGHT A CANDLE.  
IT WAS EASTER.  
THEY TOOK ME HOME AND KEPT ME LIT.  
THE WIFE WAS PREGNANT. SHE KEPT ME.  
AFTER THAT I STAYED IN THE CHILD'S ROOM AND STAYED LIT.  
BUT ONCE A YEAR, ON EASTER,  
A DROP OF WAX FALLS DOWN AND STAYS IN THE HOUSE.  
I GIVE LIGHT AND I HOPE I WILL NOT MELT TOO SOON  
SO THAT I WILL BE ABLE TO BE HERE AND BE WITH THE NEXT GENERATION  
THAT WILL BE IN THIS HOUSE.

## Oana

I AM A LITTLE SHOVEL.  
FIRST I WAS NOT SO HAPPY AS I AM NOW BECAUSE I HAD AN OWNER THAT  
DID NOT LOVE ME AND ALWAYS HIT ME.  
BECAUSE I COULDN'T STAND THE HITTING, ONE DAY ANOTHER OWNER WHO  
HAS A CHILD FOUND ME AND REMEMBERING THAT HIS LITTLE SHOVEL BROKE,  
HE TOOK ME AND GAVE ME ANOTHER LIFE, ANOTHER COLOR.  
WHEREVER HE GOES, HE TAKES ME WITH HIM AND I LOVE HIM.  
AND NOW I AM VERY HAPPY.

## Daniel

I AM A TURTLE. I AM FLOATING ON A LAKE.  
LOOKING BEHIND I SEE A HORSE AND RUN AWAY FROM THIS HORSE.  
A MAN WAS FISHING AND TOOK THE TURTLE OUT OF THE RIVER.  
HE WAS VERY HAPPY.  
HE PUT THE TURTLE IN HIS BAG AND PUT WATER IN THE BAG AND WENT HOME.  
HE SAID TO HIS CHILDREN, "IT IS A TURTLE."  
THE CHILDREN SAID, "GIVE IT TO US SO WE CAN TAKE IT TO THE RIVER."  
SO THEY TOOK HIM SOME WATER AND GAVE HIM SOME MAMELIQA\* TO EAT.  
THE NEXT DAY THE TURTLE WAS DEAD.  
THEY TOOK THE DEAD TURTLE BACK TO THE LAKE. THERE IT CAME BACK TO LIFE.  
THE MAN WAS ANGRY BECAUSE HE LOST HIS TURTLE.





### Lena

NOT TOO LONG AGO I WAS LIVING IN THE HOUSE OF MY PARENTS,  
BUT THEY DECIDED TO THROW ME AWAY BECAUSE I WASN'T A BOY.  
SO. THEY SAID, "OKAY WE WILL TAKE HER TO THE FOREST."  
MOTHER AGREED WITH FATHER.  
"OUR DAUGHTER IS ONLY A GIRL"  
SO I WAS LEFT THERE.

### Marius

I WAS LEFT IN THE FOREST.  
I AM A BIRD.  
THEN SOMEONE FOUND ME. A LITTLE BOY TOOK ME HOME.  
I WAS VERY HAPPY.  
HE GAVE ME SOMETHING TO EAT AND THAT CHILD TAUGHT ME HOW TO FLY.  
IT WAS NOT EASY BECAUSE I DID NOT LEARN TO FLY EASILY.  
AND THEN WHEN I MANAGED TO FLY HE WANTED TO LET ME LEAVE  
AND BE FREE.  
BUT KNOWING THAT THE CHILD WAS GOING TO MISS ME,  
I WENT BACK TO HIM.  
I REMAINED WITH HIM.

### Liviu

THE OWNER.  
I WAS A BOAT AND WE HAD A CHANCE TO SEE BEAUTIFUL PLACES,  
TO SEE THE SEAS.  
WE SPENT BEAUTIFUL MOMENTS TOGETHER.  
MY DREAM WAS TO GET TO KNOW AN OCEAN, AT LEAST AN OCEAN.  
BUT ONE DAY I HAD A PROBLEM, A TECHNICAL PROBLEM,  
AND MY OWNER - BECAUSE HE LOVED ME VERY MUCH -  
HE TRIED MANY POSSIBILITIES TO FIX ME SO I SHOULD BE AGAIN.  
AFTER MANY TRIES HE SUCCEEDED  
AND MY DREAM CAME TRUE.  
TOGETHER, WE WENT TO SEE THE OCEAN.

\*Mameliga is a staple Roumanian peasant food similar to polenta.

That evening we all watched the video. It was satisfying because they had spent time involved and invested in the pictures. They could more fully appreciate the animation, the unspoken stories, and the details.



## DAY FOUR - IMAGINATION

### What Was Not Seen

We began in our circle again, reinforcing through repetition, the activities of seeing that we had done the day before. We added the Clay Game to animate our visualization and communication skills (described on page 14).

We added listening, as well. Each child went to their favorite picture and looked again with the intention of discovering what the sound of the picture might be. They returned to share their sounds. We went to some pictures and then made the sound together. It was delightful to see that they were now not only seeing, but really feeling and imagining into the pictures with a sense of confidence.

Then we took an imaginative leap: What monster or creature might be hiding unseen somewhere in the picture of your choice? They found the place, and then described the creature. Why was he unseen, what was he doing, how did he get there? They made wonderful stories and then shared them, going to the pictures and showing each other what was not seen.

At the end of that day, the children were encouraged to return to looking again at all the pictures. What and how did they see them now? For all of them there was a general feeling of having more perception, more relationship, and excitement about seeing and the way in which the different artists drew and depicted images and ideas. It was wonderful to have them enjoying the artwork in such a richly meaningful and personal way.





## DAY FIVE – STORY

The day began with an early morning to a traditional market. The children had their journals and their cameras. We walked in among the horses and the carts piled with goods to be sold slowly in order to use our new tools of observation. Pictures were taken and sodas were purchased. As we started to leave there was a great sudden rainstorm and laughing we ran back up the hill and squeezed into cars to return to our room.

I told them very visual folktales The Girl and The Duck (Madri) and The Rose Child (Romanian), and they retold The Seven Sisters. Then they vividly discussed the images in the story. They now had a way to understand what an image was.



I asked them many questions, including: How would you illustrate that story? What would you choose to focus on and what might you do to help an audience feel the story? They listed the emotions of the story. I then asked them to write new endings and the history of different characters in the story.

Together they decided to make a well, a central image in The Seven Sisters. Each child had an 8 x 11 piece of paper. Inspired by stones we found outside in the village, they each made their own colorful stone to be part of the well. Then, using tape and wire we found, we taped it together and constructed a life-sized well of paper and color. On the other side of each page were wishes for safety and happiness scrawled and adorned with tiny designs.

They each became different vignettes of the story and we made mental photographs as they embodied the illustrations. We had hours of delight, hard work, cooperation, and seeing as we produced living pictures that we photographed and then had conversations between characters. We hung our pictures up besides the illustrations from The Magic Pencil. The children felt a great sense of accomplishment to be able to be the story themselves.



## DAY SIX – TELLING STORIES

Every day we began with exercises. One of the filmmakers knew Chi Gong and gave the kids a twenty five-minute workout. The focus and pleasing sense of energy became less awkward and in the last days everyone joined in. This was always followed by making the circle bows and wishes described on Day One and exploring images from the pictures as well as their own stories.

Some children were shy and wanted to read the stories that they wrote. Little by little we found ways for them to release themselves from the page and try telling the tale. Those that feared to lift their eyes from the page, or make an error, I asked to repeat the sentences slowly, asking the audience to repeat it after them. In this way they made a relationship to the audience, they listened back and soon were brought into dynamic voice. It was a startling revelation for them to feel the difference between rote reading and the life force of language and response.



In the afternoon we went into the village, armed with our capacity for looking and seeing and our cameras. Each child was to choose a village house and peruse it carefully noting details and colors, shapes and size. They drew a diagram of the house first in their journals and then decided what to photograph. The discipline of looking, choosing, trusting one's own desire for beauty was exciting to observe. They had come along way. Returning to our room, they made up stories about who was in the house and what story they told. They wrote in their journals for a long time and then enjoyed sharing the stories in pairs. It was followed by the listener retelling the story they had just heard.





That evening we were privileged to visit the home of a great weaver. The woman's house was a miracle of color and astonishing rugs, shirts, curtains, and cloths that she had woven in traditional patterns over a lifetime. We were able to see and touch everything and talk to her about her life. One of the boys who is particularly shy, manifesting an obvious feeling of general unworthiness, became the prince of the afternoon. He dressed in the most elaborate and gorgeous peasant finery. We all photographed him and drank traditional homemade wines with newly baked cookies and creams.

After dinner we walked to the river behind the fields. The kids built a bonfire, sang songs, and enacted stories about the well and the giant. Then they burned the paper well with a great cry of joy and ran around the fire with sticks and threw them in as well. I told stories to end the evening and we walked back to the village hand in hand.

IN THE CLAY GAME, THE CHILDREN STOOD IN A CIRCLE. I HELD AN IMAGINARY BALL OF CLAY THAT WAS THROWN FROM PERSON TO PERSON RANDOMLY, TO KEEP EVERYONE ALERT AND ATTENTIVE. THE CLAY BALL CAN BE CAUGHT, RESHAPED, DROPPED, KICKED BUT IT KEEPS GOING AROUND. THE WHOLE PROCESS IS GREAT FUN AND INTRODUCES PRACTICE IN IMAGINING, VISUALIZING, PAYING ATTENTION, AND ENGAGING AND CARING FOR ONE ANOTHER.







## DAY SEVEN – THE DIFFICULT DEPARTURE

Being together, living in houses in the village, enjoying stories, care and creativity, was coming to an end. We met in our room and repeated our exercises, poems (which were now about what we loved and will take home with us in our minds to remind us of this time together) and our bows. Then we talked about how to keep alive the storytelling for others when they returned. There were lots of tears and outpourings of personal stories that had remained hidden throughout the week.

Georgiana brought us all to tears as she revealed her great sorrow. “My father is no longer coming to visit me. I dream about him almost every night and when I wake up he is not there and I begin to cry.” Petronella told us she had nightmares, but refused to talk about it. They crave attention and it is not easy for them to offer attention to each other, but on this day, bound by our experiences, they listened and spontaneously made wishes for one another.

They applauded each other’s storytelling efforts and began new tales about where each character in the folktale went after the story was over. In this way they practiced envisioning their own futures as well. We ended the morning with their own dreams of what they might do in the future if they could have whatever they wanted, and we talked about what each dream would need to become reality.

The pictures were taken down in the Primaria, a big luncheon was served on the patio of the house where I was staying and slowly the buses and cars arrived for the children to go back to their Institutions. The children of Malini, so isolated, were heartbroken. Promises of letters and visits abounded. Jewelry was exchanged and, at last, the children were gone. The house was quiet. My hosts, who had helped us organize, sat silently as the chickens that hid under the barn when the children were there came out to peck for grains, and the pigs began to snore. Roluca and Daniela and I helped wash the myriad of dishes and we too took leave of the town. As we drove out three horses were outside the fence and it seemed like the village transformed again.





# A NOTE ABOUT THE GAINDEH INITIATIVES

## Our Projects and How To Get Involved

Gaindeh is a Mende word from Sierra Leone, West Africa, where several of the young people we support were born. It is translated as “the first rays of sun in the morning.” Our belief is that storytelling can uncover and activate inherent capacities of goodness, hope and resilience in everyone, just as we can count on the sun to rise every day. The goal of The Gaindeh Project is to explore, develop and create sustainable creative and cultural activity models that can serve people in crisis, transition and war; and reconnect people with the wisdom and hope available within their own culture. Needless to say, all of our projects provide immediate behavioral and happiness intervention. At present Gaindeh supports four young people effected by war who exhibit excellent leadership skills. The Coming Home Project is creating a storytelling program led by adolescents and facilitators in Romania that are helping young people in orphanages and communities. The Roma Women’s Project has used storytelling to empower women and provide hope and inner capacities for change that promote family, community and cultural well being. Our workshops and 9/11 book project continue to bring stories and storytelling skills into schools in New York City to promote tolerance and alleviate fear.

At present The Gaindeh Project is planning a Coming Home project called *Titernik* in Armenia (spring 2004) and an initiative bringing together the elderly and adolescents in a village in South India (summer 2004). Laura has just completed a book for Mercy Corps, Inc called *Becoming the World* and a training of trainers for the Comfort for Kids program. This project was financed by the 9/11 Fund and aimed at bringing storytelling and multicultural awareness to American children.

Future plans for The Gaindeh Project include the expansion of Coming Home to other countries; a transitional initiative for the Romanian adolescent storytellers to get an education and help other children; a training for storytelling for teachers and youth workers in Moldavia; and a book of stories in Romanian. The Roma Project will continue this year and include storytelling in the schools, bringing Roma tellers into mainstream schools to help overcome prejudice. Our future plans include community development, microfinancing for a women’s textile project, a Jewish Museum, and a Nature Refuge in Buhusi. We are also working on two documentaries.

The Gaindeh Project, under the direction of Laura Simms, is under the fiscal agency of the Mediators Foundation, a not-for-profit (501)c3 organization directed by Mark Gerzon. We have been funded by the Open Society, the Four Oaks Foundation and a recent substantial grant from a private donor for planning and expansion of our work.

If you would like to contribute to Gaindeh or take part in the development of our unique and fruitful projects, please contact us at:

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