

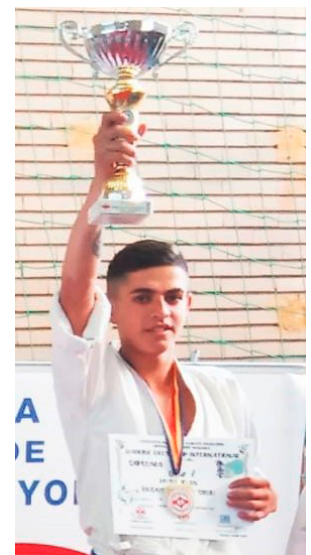
Hosman, autumn 2019

*Dear friends,*

Onu raises the trophy cup up high so that all can see what he has been fighting for. He has just become the European vice champion in karate! His beaming eyes let one guess how difficult a road it has been all the way up to this podium.

Seven years ago, I visited the Transylvanian village Nou for the first time. We entered the Roma families' clay huts. One of the poorest families was the Posas. Here the realisation of what our ELIJAH project would entail impressed me the very most forcefully. Parents and children lived in a low room less than twenty square meters in area. All ten of them. No water, no electricity. One stove warmed the room, but its smoke escaped from the badly fitted stovepipe into the room itself. In the evening they laid out old mattresses on the floor and the siblings huddled there like sardines in a tin. Their parents had no documents, no employment, and did not receive any social benefits. We brought them food and helped them to procure birth certificates, ID cards and child allowance. The mother became our first employee in our campaign "Sat curat", the clean village. Thus she could contribute her income to feeding the family.

We renovated the hut and added another room. Then we had to solve medical problems. One of the daughters had a lung disease – she would no longer be alive today if she hadn't gotten the expensive medicines. We took the small children along daily to our – at that time still mobile – social centre. When lessons were over, we were allowed to dish out meals and to give music lessons. The Posa children had never been to school before. "In winter they have no shoes to get to school through the snow", their mother explained, nor had she herself ever seen a school from the inside. Now all the children got warm boots which they soon shared with other children. Thus we had to add to the supply several times, until all had been provided for.



Onu Posa, then aged eleven, was not a good scholar and had to repeat almost every class. It was very embarrassing to have to attend class together with children four years younger who laughed at him, so he stopped going. But as soon as he heard that we were offering karate lessons in the social centre, he wanted to take part. He quickly developed into the best fighter. He was enthusiastic and loved Dana, the teacher. She managed to get him to start attending school again. The other children held the karate ace in great esteem and no longer ridiculed him. Onu took part in competitions, in the town, the county and then nationwide. He was always one of the medallists. And now he had achieved second place in the European championships!

Today, Onu is eighteen years old. He still lives in one room with his parents. The additional room has long since been occupied to the full by the extended family. Now he wants to get a job and live an independent life. On the side, he wants to finish school. He will complete the last two years in the evening school "Second Chance". He is one of the fourteen candidates who will move into the ELIJAH student hostel "Casa Francisc" in Sibiu in September.

We fixed up the "Casa Francisc" during the last year. In future, the city house will enable thirty pupils and students from our villages to get a good education and to manage a good start into independence. We assist them with their homework, cook and organize their free time with them. Please help us escort these youngsters and apprentices, all so eager to learn, on their first great steps into a new phase of life. Our fighter Onu is a role model for the children who do not yet attend school.

Thank you, dear friend, for staying by our side through all our labours and efforts. May God protect you and our children!

With affectionate greetings,

*Pater Georg Sporschill SJ*



Onu, r.: fights and wins.