

Marpod, September 2023

Dear friends,

„I can do that easily, no problem!“, fifteen-year-old Andreea laughed, confident of victory, when she set off for the grammar school entrance examination. We were more nervous than she was, but Andreea was right in her optimism. She passed the exam easily and then moved into our dormitory „Casa Francisc“ in Sibiu. In September, she will start high school. Her dream job is to be an educator. Our dream is that she will work in an ELIJAH social centre.

As good as Andreea's prospects are now, things are hard in her family. They live at the end of the village, in the Roma settlement. Once I had just come to visit Andreea when her mother came home from work. Carmen washes dishes in a guesthouse in Sibiu. „Why don't you come in for a coffee?“, she beckoned me inside. First, she had to push aside piles of laundry so we could sit down. Carmen is 49 years old and has ten children. „How do you manage, whole-day work in the city and children and household here?“, I asked her. She sighed. „I've always been unlucky, and I can't shake the bad luck.“ Then she began to tell me.

Her first husband had died, she had four children with him. She has been with her current husband for 23 years. From the start, he had girlfriends all the time. Carmen tolerated that. She was dependent on him, what could she do - four small children she had brought along, plus six more children, one after the other. Then one day Carmen's sister-in-law dropped her three off at their door and disappeared. That made thirteen. To support the children, Carmen went to work. The big ones had to look after the little ones at home and couldn't go to school. Then her husband started an affair with their neighbour. „The biggest whore in the whole alley. All the men visit her,“ Carmen scolded. She was beautiful, she said, but she had bewitched him. „He's not like he was, I don't trust him anymore. But I'd rather die than give up the family.“

Her husband had threatened to kill her if she left him. He beats her if she does not hand over the money she has earned. Sometimes she thinks about setting the house on fire when she catches him in the act with the neighbour. And yet they stay together. There are still the three youngest she has to get through, Monica, Mihai and Gabriela, who has just started school. „Every day is hell.“

„How did you manage to make Andreea into such a good girl?“, I asked Carmen.
„Andreea got all the love I could give her, but she had to help a lot. The children notice everything. When he hits me, when we fight, when he runs to the neighbour That's why Andreea wants a different life, that's what she's fighting for. I have only one wish: that the three little ones also get to go to school.“

Dear friends, the new school year has begun. Together with Andreea, 36 pupils make their home in the „Casa Francisc“. We accompany them on their way out into a better future. Thank you for your support! We wish you a good start into the new working year, with the lightness of Andreea, despite all heavy burdens,

Ruth Zerkert

Ruth Zerkert and the ELIJAH community



Carmen with Ruth and Andreea



„Casa Francisc“ – our student residence in Sibiu