St Gregory's Foundation

Helping vulnerable children and families in Eastern Europe



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HELPING MIA FIND HER VOICE

When five-year-old Mia first came to the Rain Kids Centre in Chisinau two and a half years ago, everyday life was challenging for her and her family. Mia could barely speak, using only a few sounds or words. She struggled to play with toys or connect with her parents and other people. Sometimes she would bang her head, hit others or bite. With no confirmed diagnosis, her parents faced the added worry of not knowing exactly what was causing her difficulties.

"Mia has changed so much since she started coming to the Centre! She can now tell us what she wants and is even starting to put two words together, like 'red apple' or 'big bicycle'. She looks us in the eye more often and doesn't get as upset as she used to. There's still a lot for her to learn, but we're so happy with how far she's come!"

At St Gregory's, we help make these specialist sessions possible for 85 children like Mia. Their parents can get practical advice and encouragement, and meet other families who understand what they're going through. Many are also struggling with the extra costs of caring for a child with autism, a rare disease or other special needs. So we help with everyday essentials too, including food and hygiene products. Last June, some of our supporters visited Moldova and saw for themselves what a difference this support makes. It's amazing what our local colleagues achieve with so little funding!

Could you help us provide more therapy sessions for children like Mia? Through our Christmas Appeal, you can make your donation go even further. Find out how to boost your gift and help more children and families!

LOOK HOW FAR MATVEI HAS COME!





Help Mia and Matvei Take Their Next Step!
Give on Giving Tuesday, 1 December 2026, and make your donation go further!

Donate through GlobalGiving for a chance to boost your gift with a share of its $500,000 Incentive Fund, helping fund more therapy sessions for children like Mia and Matvei.

Donate here – link..

Eligible payment methods: Apple Pay, credit or debit card, PayPal or GlobalGiving Gift Cards.

Prefer to donate by cheque or through our website?
Please see **page 7** for details on how to give.

Matvei's parents: *"Matvei has made such good progress over the past eight months! He's learning to ask for what he needs, name things around him and understand what we say to him. He can now do so much more without our help. We're really happy to see him becoming more independent!"*

Mia's parents: *Mia has come such a long way! She looks us in the eye more often, can tell us what she wants and is starting to put two words together. She's much calmer now too. These changes mean so much to us!"*

Four-year-old Matvei lives with his parents in Chisinau. Eight months ago, he started attending the Rain Kids Centre in Chisinau, alongside 85 other children with special needs and rare diseases. When Matvei first arrived, he needed extra support to develop his communication skills and learn new things. He doesn't yet go to nursery, so becoming more independent is especially important.

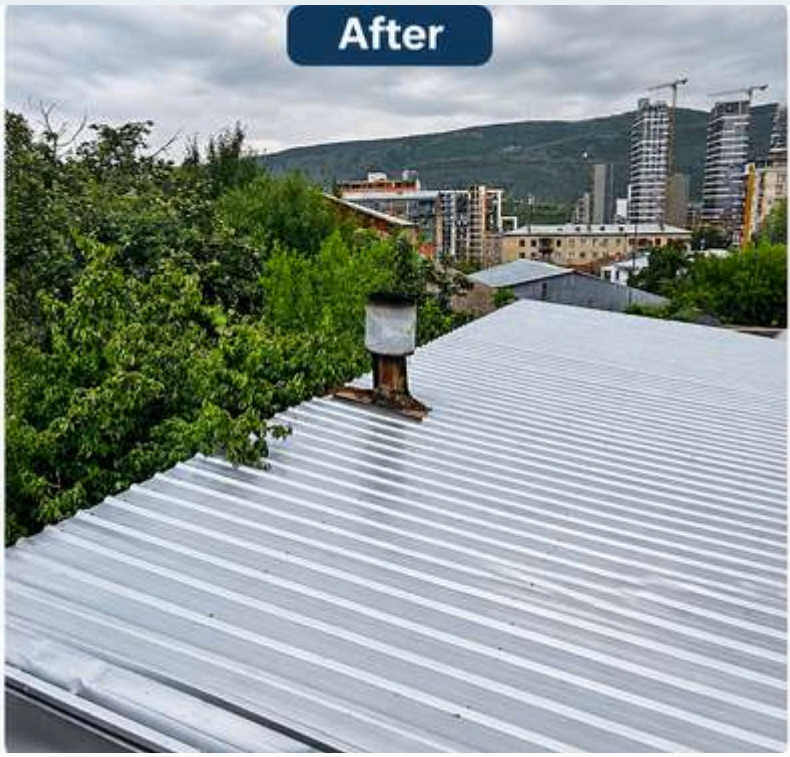
And look at him now! Matvei can use words to ask for what he wants, name objects around him and understand what people say to him.He's picking up new skills quickly and can now do much more on his own, without needing as much help as before.

With continued support from the Centre's specialists and his parents, the next step is to help Matvei use these new skills more confidently every day. Every new skill is a little victory, and we're delighted to see how far Matvei has come!

Could you help us support the Rain Kids Centre and fund more sessions with specialists for children like Mia and Matvei? Your donation could help them keep learning, growing and becoming more independent.

A SAFER HOME FOR MKURNALI





Remember our summer appeal for Mkurnali? Earlier this year, a burst sewer caused serious damage to the shelter, and many of you kindly stepped in to help. Well, we have some good news to share. The repairs have come a long way, and it's lovely to hear Nino sounding so cheerful about the progress.

We joined forces with Nana Dvali and friends of Mkurnali at the International Women's Association, who generously added to the funds raised by St Gregory's supporters. Together, we were able to tackle far more repairs than we had originally hoped.

Over the summer, the team replaced the entire roof, installed new drainage pipes, repaired the garage roof and floor, strengthened a damaged wall, replaced flooring throughout the house and waterproofed the bathroom, along with many other improvements.

There's still some work to finish, but the shelter is already a much safer and more comfortable home for the 13 people living there, including six children aged 3 to 12.

Life at Mkurnali has been busy in other ways, too. Mia, a student volunteer, has started giving the children English lessons twice a week.

Nino and her assistant continue to help with other school subjects, and St Gregory's helps cover the costs of their work.

Mkurnali's work goes well beyond providing a safe home. Its lawyer, Inga, has defended 10 cases this year, most involving young people aged 16 to 18, with three more cases still ongoing. Two people have been acquitted, five received suspended sentences, and three were given sentences of one to two years rather than much longer prison terms. In our next bulletin, we'll share Maka's story – how an unexpected conversation with a neighbour led to a mystery surrounding her grandmother's property and a complicated legal battle.

Nino also shared some wonderful news about Christina: "Christina has recently returned from Italy, where she won the European Junior Cup in trampoline gymnastics. She's now preparing for the World Cup in China."

We're so pleased to see Christina doing so well and wish her every success in her next competition.

Thank you to everyone who helped make these improvements possible. Your kindness has made a real difference to daily life at Mkurnali.

DEAF CLUB – LEARNING TOGETHER!



For parents, finding out that their child has hearing loss can be difficult. Some struggle to talk about it with family and friends, and many feel quite alone. That's why our Deaf Club is about much more than helping children learn to communicate. It's also a place where parents can meet others who understand what they're going through, share their worries and celebrate their children's progress.

Between January and June 2026, fourteen families attended the club, including six with deaf or hard-of-hearing parents. The children, aged from eight months to two and a half years, learn through music, movement and play, while their parents pick up practical ways to help them at home.

And there's been some lovely progress. Maxim, who has cochlear implants, is now saying words like 'mama', 'papa' and 'give'. Kolya is beginning to recognise where sounds come from, while Vova is using speech to communicate. Assessments in May showed that every child had made progress.

Two of our youngest members are Vera, 18 months, and Danya, just over two years old. Both wear hearing aids and have quickly settled into the group.

During music sessions, Danya has started singing, copying sounds and repeating words. His mum was amazed – she'd never heard him do that before!

Vera loves watching the other children and playing doctors with Toki. Her mum is anxiously waiting for genetic test results, but the club offers encouragement as she sees Vera's progress. It's lovely to see the children learning new skills and their parents growing in confidence. Every little step means so much to these families.



Vera and Danya are listening carefully before taking turns to place mosaic pieces – a fun way to practise attention, coordination and movement.

SUNFLOWER SUMMER CAMP



As many of you will remember, in the summer Sunflower usually takes a small group of care-leavers and their children away to the countryside to work on their parenting skills. This year, they judged that the parents' greatest need was to learn how to enjoy free time together in the city amid all the usual pressures of daily life.

Seven families committed five Saturdays to reducing conflict in their relationships and practising simple strategies to make life stable and more fun.

To start with the parents practised simple games they could play at home, and creating a quiet hour for tired young children. The children gratefully settled into this calmer time and either listened to a story or flicked through a book on their own. It was actually the parents who struggled the most.

One little girl was quietly enjoying a book when her mum started loudly drawing attention to the pictures, even shushing her daughter. Far from helping create a calm mood, she was actively breaking it. The leaders helped the mums see how they had been passing their emotions onto their children.

Some of the Sunflower parents avoid taking their children on outings because they aren't able to control their behaviour. The training during the week involved a short trip to the park at the start, building up to a circus trip and a whole day at a zoo out of town.

On the first short trip to the park the parents didn't take extra clothes for the cold or snacks. Later they planned better. With the children no longer cold or hungry, their moods improved and the families could concentrate on enjoying time together. You can see how the work they did on sharing positive attention paid off.

"*I would never have taken him to he circus at this age, but, to my surprise, he sat through it all. It's great progress for such a restless child. He especially liked the animals. . . Every day we read our little book about the circus and do magic tricks*", - Inna (her son is one year old)

"*I saw a bison, a peacock and a turkey for the first time. I liked the bison, but I didn't like it when it did a poo!*" - Arthur, aged 6

Together they have gained confidence and made plenty of memories. These skills will benefit them at home, in school and out and about.

ST GREGORY'S AGM – HAVE YOUR SAY!

Monday 30 November 2026, 6pm
Online via Zoom

This year's AGM is particularly important as we'll be discussing the charity's transition plan and future. We encourage all members to attend, have their say and help shape what comes next.

We'll also share our latest news and plans, and welcome your feedback.

Formal notice will be sent to all members. Non-members are welcome too. If you'd like to join ahead of the meeting, annual membership is £30 (waged) or £20 (unwaged).

We look forward to seeing you there!

MOLDOVA: A TRIP TO REMEMBER



We've had lovely feedback from our June trip to Moldova! As one traveller put it, "Thanks for a great trip! Moldova is truly the garden state. I've never seen so many lovely roses and flowers everywhere. That's in addition to all the sights you found for us and the visits to Sunny Corner and Rain Kids which gave a focus for the trip."

Another shared, "We had a fantastic time, learnt a lot and have wonderful memories."

Inspired by their visit, Richard and Tessa Elphick arranged a generous gift of art materials from their local Art Society for the children at Rain Kids. A big thank you to them, Gill Waller and everyone involved!

Fancy joining us on a future trip? Our affordable, tailor-made trips take small groups off the beaten track to meet local people, visit the projects we support and make a difference along the way.

A WONDERFUL EVENING WITH ANNA PASTERNAK



A huge thank you to Anna Pasternak for her fascinating lecture, attended by around 60 guests, including loyal supporters and many new faces.

We were delighted to welcome our Patron, HRH Prince Michael of Kent, who later praised Anna's "fluency and her passion for the subject" and described our lectures as "extremely worthwhile".

We've raised around **£4,500** in gross proceeds so far, with more still coming in. All net proceeds will go towards supporting children with special needs in Moldova. A huge thank you to everyone involved!

And if you missed the evening, we'll soon have personally inscribed copies of Anna's book, The American Duchess, for sale in our eBay shop.

A LITTLE NEWS FROM OUR TEAM

Our secretary, Julia Ashmore, has moved to part-time hours from **1 November.** She'll now be working **Monday to Wednesday during normal office hours**, so do keep these days in mind if you'd like to get in touch.

We're delighted to welcome Victoria Armfield, our new accountant, who joined us on 1 October. She takes over from Alina Novikova, who has moved to the US to join her family. We thank Alina for all her work and wish her all the best!

HOW YOUR DONATIONS HELP

£10 will provide toys, paints and paper to help hearing impaired toddlers learn to communicate.
£25 will help fund one week of therapy sessions for a child with special needs in Moldova.
£50 will help fund a life-changing summer camp for parents who grew up in orphanages and their children.
£120 will pay for Mkurnali's lawyer to defend one vulnerable young person through an average case.

MAKE A ONE-OFF DONATION

Donate online at
stgregorysfoundation.org.uk
or
send a cheque payable to
The St Gregory's Foundation to:
Julia Ashmore, SGF
c/o Flat 2, Effingham Lodge, Surbiton Crescent
Kingston upon Thames, KT1 2LN

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☐ I wish to become a member of St Gregory's Foundation and enclose my annual subscription of £30 (waged)/£20 (unwaged).
☐ I wish to receive the newsletter by post
☐ I wish to receive news by e-mail

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What We Do

St Gregory's Foundation supports local charities in Eastern Europe to tackle poverty and social insecurity facing children, teenagers, parents and carers. Our projects address the root causes of disadvantage by putting families before institutions, strengthening a sense of responsibility and providing opportunities for vulnerable people to fulfil their potential. Our work encourages local initiatives and makes our beneficiaries active participants in improving their own lives.

CONTACTS

Please send donations to:
Julia Ashmore
c/o Flat 2, Effingham Lodge
Surbiton Crescent
Kingston upon Thames,
KT1 2LN

For info and volunteering:
Julia Ashmore
Executive Secretary
Tel: 0203 372 4992
julia@stgregorysfoundation.org.uk

Online shop queries?
shop@stgregorysfoundation.org.uk

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CHRISTMAS CARDS AND GIFTS

Visit our Ebay shop for cards and gifts you won't find on the high street, many of them handmade by the young people we help. We're offering our Christmas cards at £3.50 per pack of 10, while stocks last.

Free postage is available on orders of more than 10 packs, but only when ordering directly through us rather than online. To arrange this, please contact Jane at jane@stgregorysfoundation.org.uk







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