

**A LIFE CHANGING EXPERIENCE:
THE PETROVO ORPHANAGE IN BULGARIA
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A few summers ago my wife, Dee, and I had a life changing experience. We visited the orphanage in Petrovo, Bulgaria. There, in that orphanage, were 95 disabled children whose quality of life didn't measure up to the communist standards. So they were taken from their families and warehoused in this remote village in western Bulgaria. The communists are gone but the children remain. The children are lined up side by side in 3 foot by 4 foot cribs one after another. These cribs are literally their prisons. Only a handful of the children can walk. Most lie in the cribs with their legs bent back, their leg muscles atrophied from disuse. Some rock back and forth in their cribs and some just lie there staring into space.

I still have the vision of little arms reaching up and begging to be held. It was heartbreaking. We went from crib to crib and picked them up. For a moment their life changed. They were wanted. But we knew that in a few hours we would be leaving and they would go back to their 3 by 4 foot cribs. It was heartbreaking to see man's inhumanity to man.

But it was also a day of joy since things are starting to change. In the orphanage we also met a number of grandmothers who had been recruited from the local village to come daily to the orphanage. They are assigned to a couple of children to feed them and care for them and most of all to give them love. These women are called "Babas" which means grandmothers in Bulgarian. If there is one thing grandmothers know, it is how to give love! The results have been phenomenal. Children who never smiled are smiling; children who never talked are talking and children who never walked are walking.

These Babas are recruited from the local village and are paid the princely sum of \$70 per month. None of the money goes to the government. It goes directly to the Babas. And for some families this is the only income they have! Now there are just 13 Babas and that is not enough. We need at least twice that number. The Macedonian Outreach pays for 7 of these Babas. I still have that vision of the children in the cribs with their arms stretched upward begging to be held. I want a Baba to be there to respond and give each child the love they deserve. You and I can't be there but we can support the Baba's. When you give to the Macedonian Outreach you are helping to ensure that someone will be there to respond to the up stretched arms of these innocent children.

Visit the Macedonian Outreach website at www.macedonianoutreach.org