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(2) Personal presentations: Nicoleta Ilie, 19 years old, Romani-Romanian, from Chiajna/Bucharest & Nicoleta Stroe Pantazi, 25, Romani-Romanian, from Bucharest.

INTRO

The following short stories started their journey at Mia's Children--

Mia's Children is a humanitarian organisation founded in 1998 in the United States, and three years later, in Romania. The founders are the Scarlat family and the Castle family. Ever since, Mia's Children has a clear mission: *Help Romanian children in difficulty build a better life, through a comprehensive educational care programme, away from poverty, abuse, abandon.* Most of Mia's children come from the Roma community. Daily, a large spectrum of activities, among which tutoring, counseling, educational and artistic activities, and much more, are 'in progress' for 35-40 children and youth, of different ages, from Mia's care. Website: <http://mias-children.ro/povestea-noastra/> (apologies, the site only has a RO version; the EN version is under construction).

Mrs Mia Scarlat was happy to share these two stories with us—there are the stories of two young women, Nicoleta Ilie and Nicoleta Stroe Pantazi, whose several good years spent at Mia's, were proven essential.

TWO STORIES

Nicoleta Ilie



Nicoleta Stroe Pantazi





Nicoleta Ilie is 19. She is Romani and lived in Mia's Children community for the past 11 years. Her family is poor and lives in the outskirts of Bucharest-- they 'barely survive', she says-- 10 brothers and sisters, both parents have been sick for a while, with little to no chance the situation will improve.

Despite the sad and difficult start-- from 4 to 11 years of age, she was in the care of a state orphanage, then at Mia's, where her life totally changed-- now, she is a first year student at the Byzantine music section of the National University of music, in Bucharest. For eight years, Nicoleta sang in the Romanian Radio & Television Children Chorus, and for three years she took music theory lessons with specialized teachers.

Giving her a chance, and preparing her to build the life she deserved, developing her existing skills and taking the right turn toward inclusion, trust and a good and dignified life.

The first success?... When she joined the Children's Chorus.

Her advise for the young Roma?... "Do not let yourselves discouraged or defeated by life's tests. Keep going. You have talents? Cultivate them. You have dreams? Pursue them. Education is the answer to many questions. Only then you will know you have a secure future."

Nicoleta's mentors?... Mia, her husband, the leader of the Chorus, the pianist...

... a wish?... To team up with people from her community, having the same aims and objectives. Raising the standards of trust, changing mentalities, contributing to the efforts of making discrimination against the Roma community disappear, enabling integration to find its way in every child's life.

"Do not give up!" is Nicoleta's definition for fulfilment.

Congratulations, Nicoleta Ilie, congratulations, Mia's Children!

Nicoleta Stroe Pantazi is 25. Same as Nicoleta Ilie, she was born in Bucharest, of Romani-Romanian origin. She is a young woman who studied Management, in Bucharest, and now she lives and works in the UK. Her early ages' story is similar to Nicoleta Ilie. Part of their life they spent together-- from an early age she was in the care of Mia's Children and received just as much love, care and attention.

Her early childhood in the family— she has 4 more brothers & sisters— was unfortunate. An unstable, aggressive environment where the father was the dominant figure. Without the family's moral support, and/or any encouragements, finally, a hand was given and it worked in favour of a less fortunate soul, now, a happy and hopeful young woman.

Education can change your live. Ambition motivates you to continue. These were among the first two lessons learned at Mia's. And, the more you learn, the more you want to learn. The more you experience progress, the more you want to continue.

We would like to share few quotes, representative to Nicoleta's personality:

"I would like to work with people responsible for helping my community, and with others, who assist. Explaining to the young Roma the importance of education will be my primary goal. I



believe in open communication as a tool, to get messages across. I believe in people, and working with others who devote their life caring about the less fortunate. This, to me is a guarantee for progress and evolution. Social responsibility is much needed, nowadays.”

“To me, fulfillment is a complex of accomplishments on a multitude of levels, and sharing my story with those in need, assisting them with their needs... will make my life complete.”

We promise Nicoleta-- her time permitting-- we will engage her in projects, in the future. She may easily be considered as an example, especially for the youngest, in your community. Bravo!

