

A Charity in the Making - the Chairman's perspective

The Libra Foundation Charity was set up in 2007. It was based on a great idea, which had been tried, tested and shown to work. In 1999, Tim Tofts, a teacher at King Edwards in Southampton started taking students out to the Alexandra Centre in Romania to work with disadvantaged children for two weeks in the summer holidays. Six years later King Edwards was showing signs of pulling out, other Schools and Colleges were approached and so the Charity was born in 2007.

Bill Darley set up the charitable company in late 2006 with advice from the Charity Commission and we had a legal trustee who provided support for the early contractual relationships. We needed a name, a logo and to read about the responsibilities of being a Trustee. Bill was invaluable, drawing on his expertise in key areas such as Finance and Risk Management to ensure our financial viability, and in making the application for our registration as a charity. It was crucial to gain the trust and confidence of the participating schools and colleges, which meant a set of documented procedures and policies which exceeded the quality of the schools' own procedures and fulfilled the British Standards for taking students on overseas trips.

Effectively delegated roles and responsibilities are key for a successful committee. We have a full-time Project Director, a Trustee for Education, a Trustee for Children, a Treasurer and a Chairman (also Trustee for Therapy). These roles have grown and changed as Libra has developed. The trustees are now looking for further expertise in communications and travel.

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As the organisation grew it became apparent that extra support was required with fundraising, student support and grant applications. Two members of staff (both part time) have been appointed and become invaluable assets to Libra and its beneficiaries.

Libra cannot exist without the support of the UK students and their parents. They go through a sharp learning curve as they find creative ways to raise funds and, once they get out to Romania, make learning fun for children who have a foreign language and a totally different culture.

Communication is crucial between all those involved in the UK and Romania. The Libra website and Libratate have helped meet this need. A set of videos have also been produced to demonstrate different aspects of the work of the Libra Foundation. These can be used to support applications for grants or other fundraising.

The Libra Foundation is an exciting and fun organisation to work with and the ideas continue to flow as our provision in Romania has become more established. The growth of an organisation brings its own challenges but these can be overcome by remembering what we are here for and summed up by Libra's four key objectives.



Teaching risk awareness as opposed to risk aversion is paramount. The Trustees have their work cut out!

In this world, the optimists have it, not because they are always right but because they are positive. Even when wrong, they are positive, and this is the way of achievement, correction, improvement and success. Educated, eyes-open optimism pays; pessimism can only offer the empty consolation of being right. David Landes

Public versus Private by Tim Tofts

Libra, like all NGO's, straddles that delicate divide between the public and the private domains. For the most part, commitment to the charity derives from a personal desire to be of some good to others. Our students in particular are fuelled by the thoroughly laudable idealism of wanting to improve a corrupted world in which hardship, ignorance and selfishness are rife. Yet Libra works amongst humans who are self-interested and lack the imagination to see further than tomorrow. Over the year we have seen human goodness being horribly stifled by the concerns of wider political interests so that the needs of individuals have been eclipsed by the aspirations of distant bureaucrats.

It is a common complaint of the directors with whom we come into contact that they somehow have to manage to balance the interest of a 'Marius' or 'Vasile' with the overwhelming projects of the State. The result is that we are left convinced that virtue has never flourished in public affairs other than briefly and precariously and that the values that we admire, mercy, compassion, justice and loving kindness, have been largely confined to the private domain. Political life is inherently corrupt, oppressive and even violent, distorting everything that is good in humanity.

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The bizarre thing about this is that we then expect the down trodden themselves to behave other than the State. We somehow expect the poorest of Romanians, the 55% of its population living on less than \$4.00 a day, to act like St Francis or Mother Theresa and when they do not, they then quickly become the objects of moral derision. There is in all of this a profoundly distorted sense of humanity that somehow expects virtue and vice to be disconnected from material wellbeing. Surely, as we see in the desperate situations of the Roma of Garcin and Tarlungeni, virtue is a luxury that the poor struggle to afford. You can not enjoy decent relationships with others when you are destitute and starving. The belief that goodness and wickedness are independent of any material context is symptomatic of a moral naivety that many of us who are well off are all too happy to possess.

And why do we convince ourselves of this lie? Because we do not put hungry children to bed each night or suffer the petty humiliations and lack of respect that our students witness being born by the Roma community and those with learning difficulties. Working amongst the poor and marginalised in Romania is enough to make one wonder how much of the world's barbarity is caused by human desperation rather than depravity. But Daniel Hristea amongst others has managed to show our young people another way. What masquerades as an innocent naivety is his keenness to both accept the poor for who they are and a willingness to afford them both respect and dignity. Daniel, and I think our students know that this is the only sure panacea for the harm caused to and by the marginalised in any society and what is more important, that it is a panacea that individuals and not States are capable of delivering.

The Making of a Charity by Bill Darley

In Rosemary Lain-Priestley's latest book, "Unwrapping the Sacred", she writes passionately about the importance of the dreams that we should encourage: *"the power of dreams, sleeping or waking, lies in how they influence our behaviour and the thoughts and images we allow to permeate our days. The trick is to allow our imaginations.....to envisage, as we would love it to be,our idea for a new project, our hopes for community or even a country."* And so it was with the creation of Libra.

Initially a school project envisioned by Tim Tofts and then, in 2007, with help from other experienced Trustees, the flowering of the dream into a full-blown charity with clear charitable objectives, Libra is now much more than a school trip. We have multiple projects across a select handful of schools with 3 trips a year to visit our Romanian partners and year-round effort to build teams across the schools. Each project has its own unique goals and challenges, its own leadership team, its own student team mixed from several of the participating schools, and therefore its own unique identity.

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The waking dream has now become a reality. Our dream was to take our energetic, talented and heavily protected students and wake them up to the realities of the harshness of the lives of many of our fellow humans. We hope that they will reflect on what that means for them personally, and for humanity as a whole. We wish them to challenge the standards of our own materialistic society and to experience the paradoxical warmth, generosity and hospital-

ity of those who have so much less than us. Our dream was for them to learn by doing, to challenge their self-imposed limits of what they believe they can do, and to realise that they can do whatever they dream they can do, given a bit of drive and a bit of organisation.

Our dream was also to give some of the most disadvantaged children in Europe the sense that somebody does care, that they are right to hope for a better life, and thus perhaps, a few might be given the strength to decide that they will take the opportunities that are occasionally offered to them. We also continue to dream of raising the profile of these children's predicament.

My role as the Finance Trustee is to encourage and support these dreams, to help develop strategies to realise them and to try to avoid the financial blind allies that waste our time and the money that we are given. If we continue to be as successful as we have been, over the next 3 years our dream is to reach double the number of students and Romanian children that we serve. This will require us to continue to inspire the support of parents, students, our Romanian partners, and we hope, also to encourage support from a few grant-giving bodies now that we have established ourselves on the Romanian charitable scene.

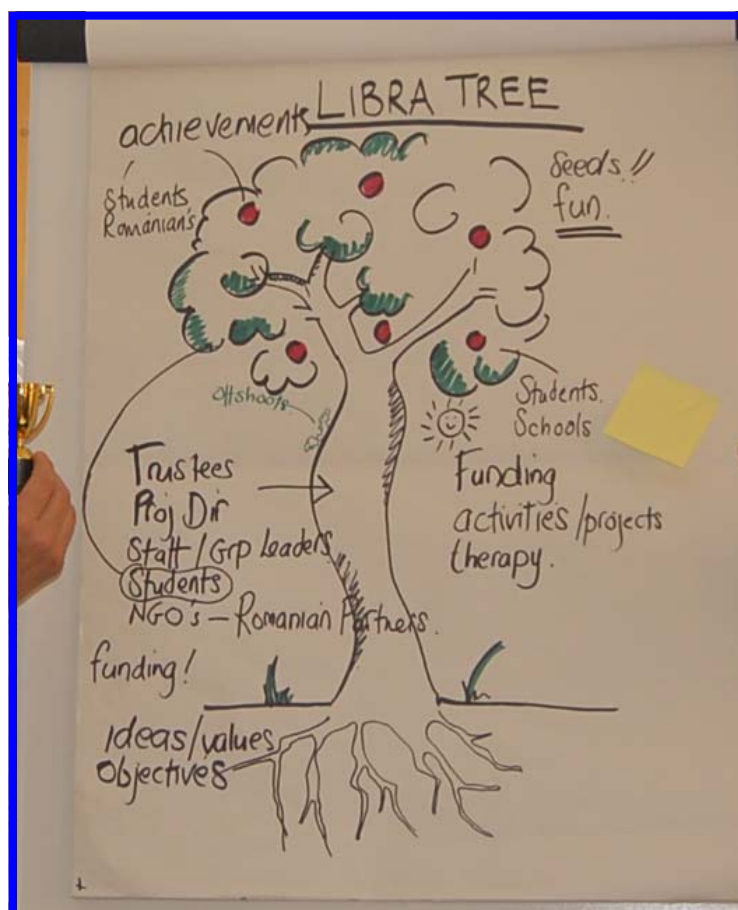
As Trustees, we regularly challenge what Libra does and why, whether it is good value for students and their parents and, crucially, whether it is useful for the Romanian children. Our visit in October is specifically to solicit feedback from our Romanian partners on whether our dream is of any value to them. In Lain-Priestley's words *"we should always be careful that what we long for is worthwhile and creative and somehow true and that it will in some profound sense, rather than just superficially, make us and other people happy."* We think it is, and we continue to invite others' feedback to improve the impact of our work.



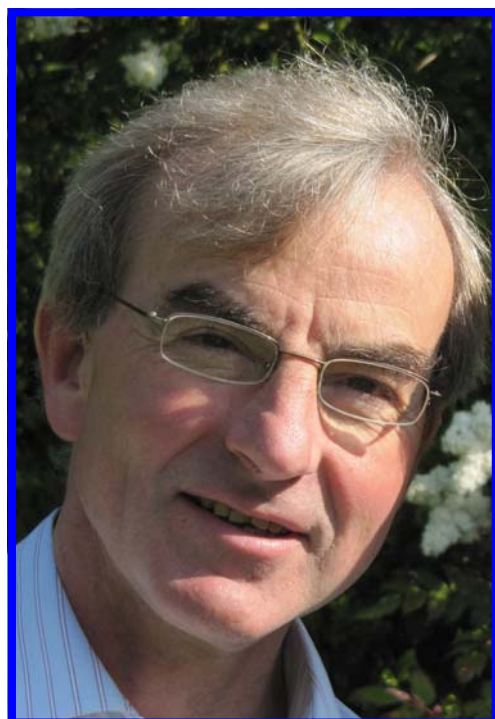
Diana Heatly



Tim Tofts



The Libra Tree!



Bill Darley



Olivia Darley

PHARE report on integration and access to education

The PHARE (The Programme of Community Aid to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe) report was of particular interest to LIBRA since it concerned itself with access to education of both the marginalized Roma and rural populations that Libra works with in Sacele, Bacau and Comanesti. The PHARE project had been directed at improving access to education, at decreasing student drop off and providing a 'Second Chance' for pupils who had stopped their schooling and wish to re-attend. The report's statistics are impressive: 391 schools and 60,000 pupils being touched by the program, 7,815 teachers have been involved in training schemes devoted to inclusion of minorities. However, the report acknowledges, and Libra has observed, that whilst there has been some improvement in intercultural exchange this has rarely developed into a substantial awareness of diversity. Segregation is still endemic and in many instances derives from parents and teachers rather than pupils. Tacit consent of integration programs is common and Head Teachers rarely understood the complexity of what was being demanded by the programs to which they had subscribed. Perhaps the saddest indicator of all of this was that only 73/400 school had bothered to return the PHARE questionnaire having benefited from the grants that were on offer.

Nigel Shakespeare, a former assistant military attaché with the British Embassy now working in Bucharest, has been a spectator on the work of the PHARE report on integration and access to education of disadvantaged children in Romania. We asked him to explain about what he had observed so far. Nigel has commented:

The PHARE programmes to improve access to education for disadvantaged groups closed in 2009 with the last project being an impact evaluation of the programme. Whilst significant change was effected in some countries, in Romania the overall situation remains full of significant challenges – the Ministry of Education and Roma activists differ in their opinion as to how effective the programmes were. Many of the original problems remain and will not disappear without sustained policy and funding over decades. Overall education in Romania has suffered from a lack of funding, teacher emigration and a lack of continuity in ministerial leadership. Access to education for disadvantaged groups is one of a number of problem areas for the national leadership to consider and is not necessarily seen as the most important. It is not clear what strategy is being followed to expand what has been learned from the PHARE programme.

Nigel told us that the PHARE report had been written under Romanian governmental scrutiny and was therefore not entirely independent. Comments of his suggest that what is written is loaded with political 'Double Speak' and that the situation is not fully represented.

It is evident that the take up has 'not been impressive' due to bureaucratic processes and the substantial motivation needed for people to take on the extra work required to run a project.

Whilst watching the parade of his youngsters through Comanesti he thanked Libra for what it had achieved. He was insistent that the achievement had not only been in music, artwork and costumes but also in raising expectations, in opening possibilities and in taking risks

Nigel also hinted that the high influx of funds had not been sensibly directed at the target communities and that much had been wasted on middle management. His comments about Daniel Hristea's project in Sacele suggested that a 'bottom up' approach to alleviating poverty had the potential to be much more effective than the 'top down' approach of the EU where wastage was endemic. Reading through the 70 page shortened version it is clear that there have been successes but due to poor realisation, entrenched prejudice and poor funding, much has been essentially cosmetic. Training has been a large concern for PHARE yet surveillance of schools suggests that methods have not been fully applied nor initiatives sustained. Lucian Bodor, Director of Pietricica, hinted at the root of the problem. Whilst watching the parade of his youngsters through Comanesti he thanked Libra for what it had achieved. He was insistent that the achievement had not only been in music, artwork and costumes but also in raising expectations, in opening possibilities and in taking risks. He was part of a culture where prejudices are so deeply entrenched that they have become God given certainties. Libra had liberated him and his staff and for a moment had shown him another way. The interesting thing will be to see whether enough has been done for the Romanians to follow along the same path. If the PHARE document and Libra's past experience are anything to go by, inclusion of Romania's disadvantaged children will need more than a morning's carnival.

Tim Tofts, Libra Trustee



A Family of Gypsies camping by a river that we passed when travelling between Onesti and Sacele in April

PORTRAIT OF ROMANIA NO 4 Michael Eminescu (1849-1889)

It is more than likely that Libra student volunteers have passed the monument to Michael Eminescu (1849-1889) on the main street in Onesti without ever noticing that it depicts a human face let, alone the face of Romania's national poet.



Metal Sculpture of Eminescu

The same face appears on the 500 Lei banknote and in innumerable public places throughout the country and as far afield as Islamabad, Pakistan. Eminescu was a conservative nationalist, a romantic bohemian and a philosopher strongly influenced by German Idealism. Perhaps all of this makes Eminescu an unlikely candidate for a national hero, however his status is assured by virtue of his ability to use phrases, ideas and metaphors from all regions of Romania and combine them in poems that speak of the human condition and of the suffering of the Romanian minority as part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Eminescu was born in Botoşani, Moldavia in 1850; he studied philosophy, history, law, political economy, and philology at the University of Philosophy in Vienna and then afterwards at Berlin

where he encountered Schopenhauer, from whom adopted a profound melancholy. He soon became known as a poet of some distinction through his regular contributions to the newspaper *Timpul* based in Iasi. His life, like other Romantics of the period was horribly cut short by mental illness brought on by syphilis and he died at the young age of 38 in an asylum in Bucharest.

Of lasting value to any educator or parent is Eminescu's metaphor of the human mind as a room with an entrance and an exit. Educated people with no talent, he observed, allow ideas to enter the darkness of the room and then pass through indifferent, alone and unaffected. However, talented people are like a bright room with many mirrors. In this room ideas are entertained, treated with dignity, mixed with one another and assorted to form a new harmonious whole; what leaves the room is never the same as that which enters. Human talent is accommodating yet it possesses a creativity that manages and moulds ideas rather than simply leaving them be.

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What a triumph it would be if our young people encountered the world in this way with their mind acting as kaleidoscopes in which ideas were mixed together to form beautiful patterns. And what might become of their experience of Romania were it to be reflected and transformed in such a hall of mirrors. Eminescu believed that such talented minds would accommodate every experience and dignify them into an harmonious whole. Here is an aesthetic ideal that Libra strives to realize in its work for social inclusion and Eminescu in his brief life wrote about so eloquently.

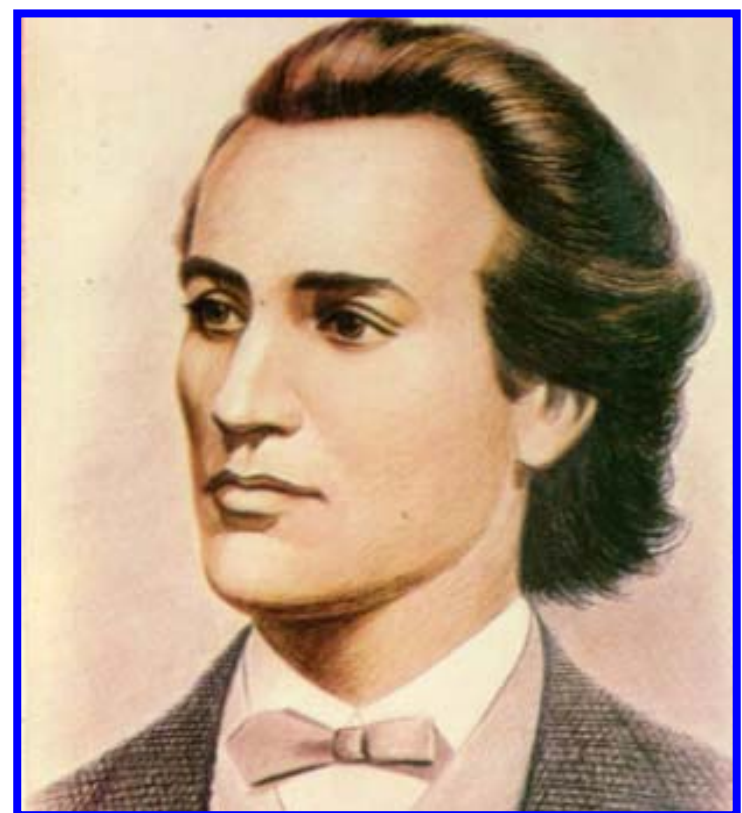
Sleepy birds

All those sleepy birds
Now tired from flight
Hide among the leaves
Good-night!

Only the spring whispers
When the wood sleeps silently;
Even flowers in the gardens
Sleep peacefully!

Swans glide to their nest
Sheltering among the reeds
May angels guard your rest,
Sweet dreams!

Above a night of sorcery
Comes the moon's graceful
light,
All is peace and harmony
Good-night!



***"Break up this social system, crude, unjust,
Which divides the world into rich and poor".***

I have recently read that Directors of Charities should consider retiring after 3 years because they “burn out”! There are occasions throughout the year when the challenges of Libra prove to be almost overwhelming and a return to my work in Portage, a home visiting service for children with disabilities, seems rather more attractive! When the going gets tough however, I am extremely fortunate to be able to turn to Libra’s committed, enthusiastic and talented trustees, all of whom willingly devote huge amounts of time and energy to the cause.

Chairman Diana Heatly, a senior physiotherapist at The Rose Road Association, leads the team with warmth and sensitivity and is always ready to listen, motivate and muck-in! Tim Tofts, a philosophy teacher at King Edward’s and the founder of the Romania project brings years of schools’ experience and is superb at handling relationships including those occasional delicate issues with students, parents, and team members alike. Bill brings years of experience in the world of finance and risk management to control and manage Libra’s growing complexities. In addition to this role, he spends many hours on strategic planning and working with the office staff to ensure Libra has the finances it needs to run its growing number of projects. Olivia, our latest addition to the Trustee body, is a tremendous support in Romania particularly, and through her sound knowledge of all the different projects can step in to any role and undertake the plan-

ning and preparation of activities in-country. These 4 vitally important people are Libra’s foundation and I am eternally grateful to them for their support, sense of humour and incredible hard work!

The Libra office is a hub of activity during the week with our salaried staff Becky Dawkins and Rosie Dawson working on fundraising. Becky who joined us in November 2009 has in addition donated huge quantities of hours to get the grant fundraising launched alongside helping with any and all administrative tasks. I am so grateful for her hard work and help in any situation!

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Virginia Darley



Onesti: Julia Heissig and Moira Mulqueen



Bacau: Huw Williams



Bill and Olivia Darley, Becky Dawkins, Diana Heatly and Tim Tofts



Sacele: Clare Talks



Comanesti: Moira and David Whitlock



Bacau: Elaine Martin



Comanesti: Louise Darley



Onesti: Fiona Stoppard



Bacau: Charlotte Holdsworth



Sacele: Olivia Darley



Sacele: Rosie Larcombe

If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.
John Quincy Adams

WITH GRATEFUL THANKS

There are so many people who put enormous time and effort into the Libra Foundation that to write a paragraph about each and every one would turn the Libratate into a book. The charity is immensely fortunate to have the interest, love and support from students, parents, schools, leaders, Romanian partners and volunteers and all our Libra Friends and we would like to thank everyone wholeheartedly.

Staff

Becky Dawkins Grant Seeking Fundraiser and Administrator
 Rosie Dawson Event Fundraiser
 Heidi Groves Raines Ex-event fundraiser
 Anna Rubycz Ex-event fundraiser

All Libra Students with a special mention to:

Alex Harden For raising £750
 Lily Green For launching Peter Symonds
 Sereena Ohri For collating the Libratate articles

All Parents for their continued support

Schools

Tim Tofts - KES
 Clare Talks - Winchester College
 Tracy King - Taunton's College
 Simon Laycock - Brockenhurst College
 Sara Goodhead - Peter Symonds
 Amilake for their generous therapy equipment donation
 Constance Green for their generous donation
 Tim and Lesley Kelly from Millfield for their continued support
 Chris Mutch for transport the Libra equipment to Romania
 Rosie Mitchell, Libra's Occupational Therapist

Leaders:

Moira Mulqueen Onesti Group Leader
 Julia Heissig Onesti Deputy Group Leader
 Fiona Stoppard Onesti Team Leader
 Clare Talks Sacele Group Leader
 Olivia Darley Sacele Deputy Group Leader
 Rosie Larcombe Sacele Team Leader
 Huw Williams Bacau Group Leader
 Elaine Martin Bacau Deputy Group Leader
 Charlotte Holdsworth Bacau Team Leader
 Moira Whitlock Comanesti Group Leader
 David Whitlock Comanesti Deputy Group Leader
 Louise Darley Comanesti Team Leader

Romanians

Corina Botez Director of The Alexandra Centre
 Irena Volunteer Coordinator
 Daniel and Ema Hristea Founders of FAST Charity
 Liz Greenhalgh Volunteer Coordinator
 Ruxie and the volunteers
 Cristina Birsan Director of AAS
 Simona Social Worker at AAS
 Doamne Ulea Director of Bradet
 Doamne Iolande Buna Head Teacher of Bradet School
 Doamne Magda Buna Social Worker at Bradet
 Adrian Woodroffe Coordinator of project
 Cristina Woodroffe Psychologist at School 7
 Nina Atomulesei Teacher at School 7
 Laura Murgu Teacher at High School
 Liliana and Gabi Teachers at School 4
 Maria Director of Casa Lumina
 Lucian Bodor Director of Pietricica
 Delia Barzu Director of Robert Cole Centre
 Cristina Taras Director of Robert Cole Centre
 Friends from Biggin Hill Romania Group
 Robert Laic Head Teacher of School 7
 Gabriella Achihai President of FSC
 Gabriel Magurianu Volunteer Coordinator of FSC

And All The Wonderful Romanian Volunteers!



Comanesti Team



Onesti Team

Onesti Team

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Julia Heissig
Fiona Stoppard
 Chloe Wright
 Megan Robertson
 Samantha Taylor
 Rebecca Ainsworth
 Anuradha Kachhwaha
 Alice West
 Isobel Stone
 Jessica Hall
 Alexander Percival
 Natasha Gracias
 Oliver Rew

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Roseanna Larcombe
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 Zoe Cousins
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Bacau Team

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 Alex Harden
 Crispin White
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 Sophie Carruthers
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 Cherie Ryland
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 Sereena Ohri
 Isabel Eldergill-Storm
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