

Making children smile again

Before the operation: Staff members from Diakonia Albania visit Blerta at the Pogradec hospital



We generally don't hear much about daily life at the Bishnica children's center: about regular school attendance, the ongoing care provided by our staff, or the individual progress the children make. How essential this place is to the lives of the children there, though, becomes clear in emergencies like the one that occurred recently. It brings a personal story back into the spotlight—a childhood full of drama and hope.

Image: Elda Oparaku

Blertas' emergency dental surgery

Blerta* is only ten years old. After a childhood marked by neglect, trauma, and malnutrition, she finally found safety, care, and stability at the Bishnica children's center. However, the consequences of those difficult years remain. One of the greatest challenges she faces today is her dental health. When Blerta first arrived at our center, almost all of her teeth required treatment. Over the past few year, we have done everything in our power; but the damage caused by years of hardship continues to require ongoing care.

Blerta's situation is even more complex because she lives with epilepsy. As a result, dental procedures cannot be performed in a regular clinic. For her safety, every intervention must take place under specialized hospital supervision in Tirana, where immediate medical support is available if complications arise.



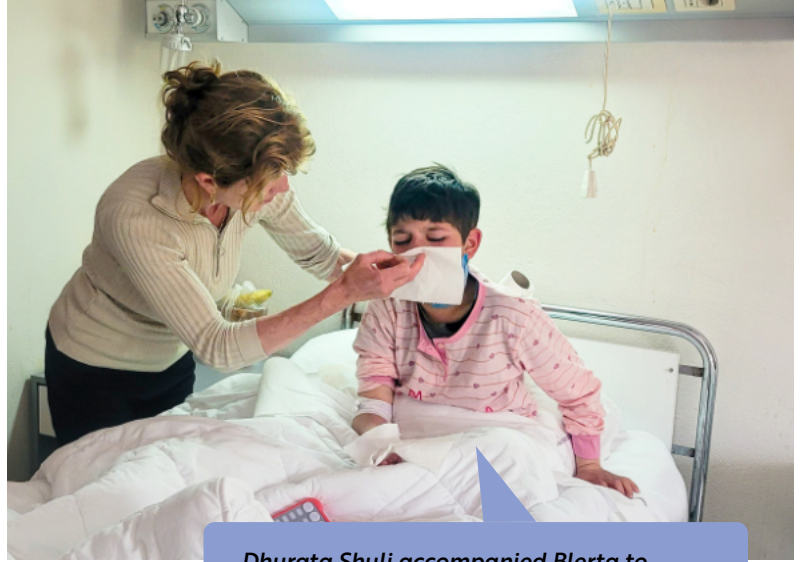
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Project page
www.chwev.de/en/childrens-center



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Dhurata Shuli accompanied Blerta to the hospital and stood by her side

What Blerta's caregiver says about the situation

My name is Dhurata Shuli, and I work as a caregiver at the Diakonia Albania foundation. I feel blessed to care for the children. Although the work can be challenging, I am also very proud because we receive so much love from them.

One of our girls, Blerta, became seriously ill due to a severe dental infection. For several days, she suffered from intense pain, fever, and swelling, and her condition worsened quickly. Because she lives with epilepsy, her treatment required special medical supervision, and she had to be transferred to Tirana for specialized care. Throughout this difficult time, I stayed by her side and remained in close contact with Aurora and the rest of the team.

The hardest day was when Blerta was taken into surgery. In that moment, I did not feel like just a caregiver—I felt like a mother. Seeing her frightened and in pain was heartbreaking, and my only prayer was that everything would go well. Blerta spent several days in the hospital under medical care. Thankfully, the surgery was successful, and she is now feeling much better.

I am deeply grateful to everyone who supports our children. Every contribution makes a difference in their lives and helps provide the care, protection, and opportunities they deserve. Your support gives children like Blerta hope for a healthier and brighter future.

● *Dhurata Shuli, caregiver at the children's center*

A few weeks ago, Blerta developed a high fever, severe swelling, and intense pain caused by a serious dental infection. She was initially treated with antibiotics, but her condition deteriorated rapidly. Following consultations with local doctors and dentists, she was urgently referred to Tirana for specialized treatment. The doctors there determined that the infection had advanced and that emergency surgery was necessary to remove the affected tooth. After the necessary preparations were made, Blerta underwent surgery the very next day.

Thankfully, the operation was successful, and after several days of recovery she was able to return to the center. Still, she must return to Tirana for the treatment and extraction of two more severely damaged teeth.

The cost of the surgery itself is covered by the public health system. However, our children's center must cover numerous additional expenses, including transportation to Tirana, caregiver support throughout her hospitalization, food, clothing, medications, and other essential needs related to her treatment and recovery. These ongoing medical needs create a financial burden that we cannot carry alone.

** To protect the children, we changed names and blurred their faces*

More than shelter: the story of Blerta and Bledi*

Children like Blerta and her younger brother Bledi have a very special story—and they are the reason our children’s center exists.

In late 2023, regional television reported on the alarming conditions under which the two children were living. They were often seen wandering the streets unsupervised, hungry, unwashed, and without adequate clothing. They did not attend school regularly and were frequently mocked and bullied by other children—two poor children. Following the report, the Child Protection Unit of the Municipality of Pogradec immediately convened an interdisciplinary emergency meeting; it was decided that the children should be removed from their family environment and placed under emergency protection at the children’s center in Bishnica.

Considering the living conditions, our staff realized that the problem went far beyond mere poverty. The family’s home was uninhabitable: dirt, clutter, and neglect were everywhere. The mother suffered from severe mental health problems, while the father struggled with alcoholism. The children had already endured years of neglect, fear, and various forms of abuse. They had grown up without the safety, stability, and protection that every child needs and deserves. The only person who tried to care for them was their grandmother; despite her advanced age and limited means, she did everything she could for her grandchildren. After the children moved to Bishnica, she continued to visit them regularly. For Blerta and Bledi, she remained their strongest connection to family. Her passing last year was one of the most painful losses the siblings had experienced since their arrival at the children’s center.

When Blerta and Bledi arrived at Bishnica, their physical condition was alarming. Both children suffered from scabies and severe parasite infestations; following medical advice, they were accommodated separately during their first weeks and were bathed, treated, and constantly monitored by our caregivers. But what touched us most was not their physical condition. They did not know how to use a toilet properly. They had never developed basic hygiene habits. They were unfamiliar with foods that most children consider ordinary. They were not used to regular meals; they often ate in a hurry or tried to save some food, afraid there might be nothing left later—a result of years spent in insecurity and deprivation.

Psychological assessments conducted over the years revealed deep emotional insecurity, a lack of stable caregiving figures, and a profound need for emotional support and reassurance. Yet those same assess-



Blerta and Bledi 2023 as they were taken in at Bishnica, and today

Homework help and recreational activities at the children's center





Images: Aurora Zeqo

Psychological guidance and doctor's visits are part of the services offered by the children's center

ments revealed something equally important: despite everything they had endured, they had not lost their ability to trust, connect with others, and grow when provided with safety and care.

And so, over the past few years, our staff at the children's center became their second family. Our caregivers accompanied them to hospitals, helped them with homework, comforted them when they cried, celebrated their achievements, and stood beside them through every challenge. Our teacher works with them individually every day. When they first arrived, both children showed significant developmental and educational delays. Today, they are learning to read and write and are developing skills that once seemed beyond reach. When you see Blerta and Bledi playing in the center's courtyard today, it is almost impossible to imagine where they came from. They are smiling, active, energetic children full of life. They participate in activities, build friendships, make plans, and dream about their future just like any other child.

This is why Bishnica exists. Not simply to provide children with a roof over their heads. But to give them safety when they are afraid, care when they are sick, education when they have been denied opportunities, and love when life has not been kind to them.

● **Aurora Zeqo, Executive Director of Diakonia Albania,**
Albanian partner organization of Christlicher Hilfsverein Wismar e.V.




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The Children's Center depends on your donations

Blerta and Bledi's story proves that even the deepest wounds can begin to heal when a child receives the proper support. Seeing them smile again today is the best proof we could ask for of just how important and valuable the work in Bishnica is.

So please consider supporting the work of the children's center in Bishnica with a generous donation or regular financial contributions. Your support gives children a future who, without this help, might never have a reason to smile.

Thanks in advance for your support. With warm regards,


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