

## The Letter

### Nicu's True Story

Nicu was born in a village in Romania, where he lived with his younger brother and his parents. When he was nine, a gang came into the village and told his family that they could find work for Nicu around Europe. They told his parents that they would lend Nicu money for his travel costs and accommodation, and after he had paid back his debt, he could earn a lot of money which he could send back home. Nicu's parents believed this and they gave the gang 200 euros to take Nicu abroad. This gang, however, had lied to Nicu's family. They were human traffickers and they had deceived his parents in order to recruit their son into human trafficking. The traffickers planned to exploit Nicu - to force the 9-year-old boy to steal - and to keep the all money for themselves. As with most trafficking victims, Nicu had not been kidnapped.

First, Nicu was driven to Spain where he lived in a house with many other trafficked children. Here, he met an older boy Andre, who taught him how to steal and to beg. Every day the children were forced to steal and to bring the stolen money back to the men. One day when Andre came back he was beaten very badly because he hadn't stolen enough money. Nicu saw this and it terrified him.

After a few months, Nicu was flown to the UK. He was taken to a house in London where he was forced to live with fourteen other adults and children. Again, he was made to spend all day on the streets and to steal. Some days it was freezing and he was often hungry and very weak. He was terrified, but he knew he had to do what the traffickers said, otherwise he would get into trouble. To maintain control over the young victims, the traffickers would abuse them, emotionally and physically.

One morning, the police came to the house. Nicu couldn't speak much English, so he couldn't understand what the police were saying. They asked him a lot of questions, but because the men in the gang were watching him, he didn't say anything. The traffickers had probably threatened Nicu. They might have warned him that if he talked to the police, someone in his family would be seriously hurt.

Nicu was placed with a foster family. He started to go to school, but that environment was very unfamiliar to him. Unfortunately he was bullied, and in the end he refused to go. Again, he was interviewed by the police, but he was still too scared to tell them anything. Nicu said he didn't want to stay in the UK, so he was returned to his parents, who were also asking for him.

*Later, ECPAT (Every Child Protected Against Trafficking) UK tried to find Nicu but discovered that he no longer lived with his parents. It is very possible that Nicu has been re-trafficked.*