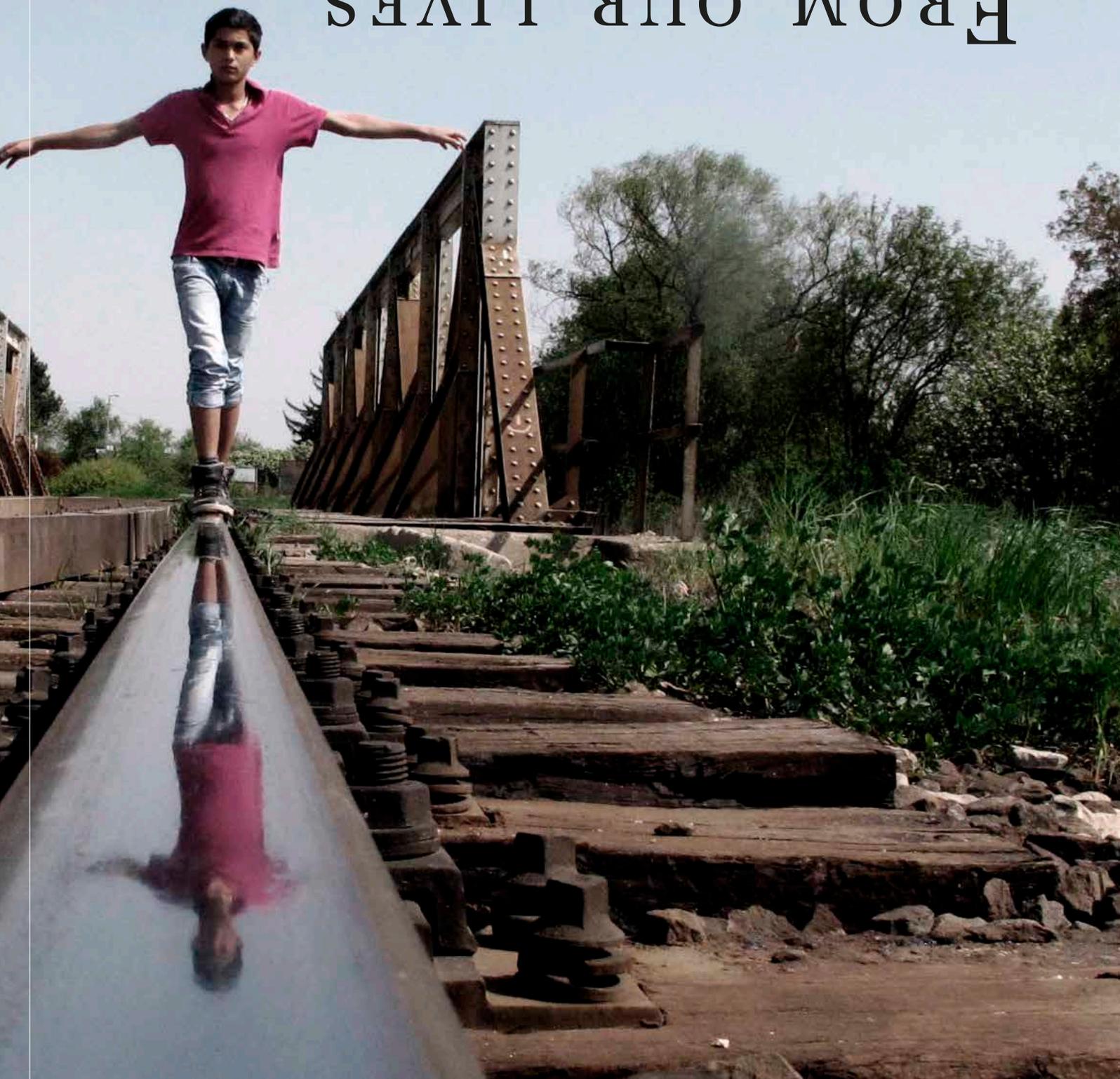


# ANDAL O DŽIVIPEN FROM OUR LIVES







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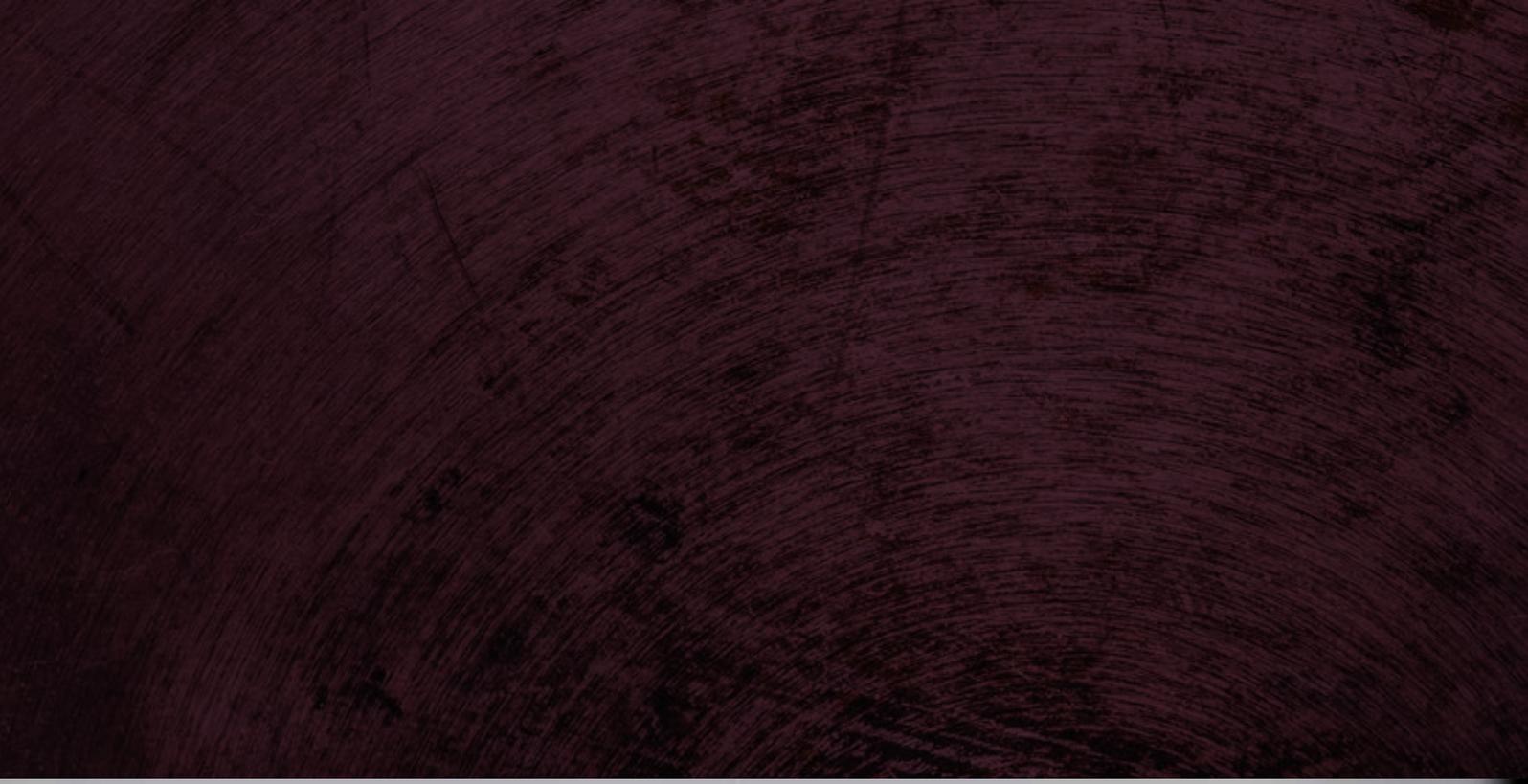
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# INTRODUCTION

In a settlement one can find both ugliness and beauty. At first sight, the former usually prevails. Considering the widespread pitiful conditions faced by the people living in settlements, what kind of beauty can one expect to find amidst the misery? Settlements are usually associated with a constant lack of resources needed for decent living and with the daily uncertainty about lack of food, clothing, and personal hygiene items. What prevails is a lack of trust in oneself and the world around, a low interest in education, and many obstacles arising from the “otherness”. This has been going on for generations. No wonder these people find it hard to believe that the time for change could be right now. It takes courage to remain optimistic and dare to dream. Fortunately, such brave people do exist and it is their stories that this book portrays.

There is beauty to be found in the people living in settlements if we are willing to search for it. It takes eyes that see clearly and ears that are able to sense false sounds. The beauty lies deep inside these people’s hearts. Sometimes their hearts open instantly, other times it takes patience to discover the beauty within. We set out to search for the beauty and it appears that we have succeeded in finding it.

During the many interviews we performed in the settlements, we not only posed questions to the respondents; we also questioned ourselves. There are many new things which we have learned but also many things we did not find surprising. As we supposed, building on trust, a friendly attitude and sincere interest always bears fruit.

However, just to “smile” is never enough to help. Real help involves investment in the future. It can be aimed at education, decent housing, employment, and many other spheres, all embraced in our “cradle-to-career” approach.

Working on the first volume of *Andal o dživipen (From Our Lives)*, four years ago, we decided to illustrate the stories from the settlements with images created by young people who had been allocated cameras to document life around them. Many of the images spoke better than any wise or convincing words could. The Creative Photography Workshop, led by a professional instructor, turned into a real workshop in which self-confidence, creativeness, diligence and a different view of reality were shaped. Two of the participants, whose pictures were among the most impressive, have decided to take their passion for photography to a higher level and began to gather around them young people to pass on what they had learned as teenagers. These participants include Karol Horváth from Moldava nad Bodvou and Dávid Korčkovský from Stará Ľubovňa. Their work has been used again to illustrate the present book and, what is more, the second volume also contains their stories. Among the illustrations we have also included some photographs made by Dávid’s followers. The photographs were selected and arranged by Dávid himself.

In the present book, we have also decided to include interviews with people who have helped us in our work. The beauty we were searching for in the settlements could also be found in their hearts. Maybe it is the beauty that brings them close to our clients.

Looking back at *From Our Lives* written four years ago, at the end of the book we can find proposals and recommendations for the public sector that were created in the process of our work and whose results were described in the stories. We were wishing for the members of other marginalized Roma communities in Slovakia to enjoy the same opportunities as our clients did. Now we are glad to see it become reality in several aspects. Within the National Project, community centres have been established, adopting our approaches. Our verified microloans model is included in the state’s strategic plan for the development of marginalized Roma communities up to 2020. We have also encountered assurances for the implementation of our innovative education method in the state education system. It all gives us even more motivation to think, create, innovate, verify and constantly search for new ways from which our clients can benefit.

In everything we do, we think one step ahead. To all those who find themselves firmly anchored to the present or even the past, we offer some fresh air in the form of recommendations for policy makers and employees of organizations that offer services to members of segregated communities. What makes us competent to give those recommendations are countless encounters with people “in our field,” knowledge of the “local” conditions and way of life, and years of experience validated a thousand times. We believe that those who have also dared to step out into the future, as we have, will make our recommendations become reality.

The second volume of *Andal o dživipen* also contains a series of recommendations. They follow the sets of stories that are a proof of the success of our interventions. Each set of stories has a certain common denominator. The stories are revised at the end of each sequence and followed by the related recommendations for the design of public policies.

Our objective is simple: to give everyone as many opportunities as possible to make the most of the best that undoubtedly lies within each individual.

Please, read on to see that, indeed, there is a lot to be found.



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## SETTLEMENT'S OLDEST INHABITANT

**V**erona Bilá has lived in Ostrovany all her life. She never went farther than the nearby town of Prešov. She is going to be ninety two on Saint Nicholas' Day. None of her contemporaries are still living; she is the oldest inhabitant of Ostrovany.

Up to last summer, she would still go to the forest to pick mushrooms on her own, and she was still able to take care of her poultry. This summer, however, she felt a bit weak, so she rather stayed home. During our visit she would interrupt her narration to take a short nap, and when she awoke, refreshed, she lit a cigarette and continued.

"We used to live in misery, working hard and being constantly poor. Since I was twelve, I worked on white people's estates. We were given food in exchange for our hard labor. Otherwise, we would have been starving..." Verona recalls.

Grandma Verona has been living with her daughter Irena Kuchárová since autumn. Irena is a widow; all her daughters got married and moved out, so she remained with her son Marek, who does not have a family of his own. Considering the settlement's conditions, they live relatively comfortably; they have running water, a toilet, two rooms, and a big kitchen. Therefore, they were able to invite the grandmother to live with them. Before that, she had lived with her daughter Eva. Now she has much more comfort, enjoying a room she has completely for herself.

"I've had a good life. I constantly pray to Jesus and Virgin Mary, asking them for help... I had a good husband with whom we raised seven good children. We were together since I was seventeen... When we married in church, we already had had two children... My husband died thirty five years ago. I was sitting next to him, holding him by the hand..."

Verona Bilá has thirty one grandchildren and over a hundred great-grandchildren. The family comes to visit their grandma daily; the house of Irena Kuchárová is always full of people. "I love them all," the grandma says. She never mistakes their names, her mind still clear.

Her great-granddaughter Veronika Kalejová has gone furthest of all the children. She works at the Municipal Office and she also used to study at university while there was a fund to cover the study expenses for people from a disadvantaged environment. When the fund was not approved for the next period, Veronika had to leave school, unable to pay the tuition. Still, by having graduated from secondary school, she attained the highest education of all Verona's family members.

The grandmother never went to school. At that time it was common for the people living in the settlement in Ostrovany not to be able to read or write. They did not need to; what was important was strength to be able to work, as there was always plenty of work to be done.

When the children of Verona and her husband Štefan grew up, the family moved to live in the rural area under Šariš Castle. With another Roma family they were working on what used to be state property at that time. "We would wake up early in the morning, feed the livestock, pasture the cattle, take care of the estate, and we would go to bed exhausted. This took twelve years of our lives. Whenever there was some time left, my husband would weave baskets and I would make wicker brooms, which we would sell from time to time. We would ride a horse-drawn carriage to visit our children in Ostrovany. We were happy to have lived in the countryside; we didn't miss anything," Verona explains. She returned to the village only after her husband died.

She has been healthy all her life, not having been taken to the doctor's until this winter; she had trouble breathing, so she had to spend some time in the hospital. "Our mother has never taken any pills and she still doesn't want to. When we try to give her pills, she spits them out because of their bitter taste," says daughter Irena.

"The life in Ostrovany has changed in some ways and remained the same in others," says Verona, as she compares the times of her youth with the present. "We used to have wooden houses; now everybody has a brick house. But the misery has remained because people don't have work..."

Daughter Irena, granddaughter Naďa and great-granddaughter Veronika are counting how many of their family members have built or reconstructed a house, built a kitchen or connected their house to electricity: fifteen people altogether. All of them have used money from the ETP savings or microloans to realize their construction plans. ETP Slovakia has currently one-hundred and ten clients who have been repaying, or have already repaid, their microloans.



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## ROMA SONGS CANNOT BE DESCRIBED; THEY HAVE TO BE FELT

**R**išo Čisár from Šaca shows up for the interview in his work clothes, covered in paint. “I don’t have much time; I am working on decorating a flat with a friend of mine,” he says in one breath.

Richard is attending the Technical Vocational School in Košice, studying to become a bricklayer. He is due to take his final exams in June. To decorate his friend’s house is child’s play to Richard but he can use the little money he earns. Richard lives with his parents and two younger siblings. Their mother is not working and the father had to quit his job after a work accident at a factory. Richard has two more siblings, both of them adults living independently.

“I’ve earned honors two years in a row now. I enrolled in the school after finishing the seventh grade of primary education because I had been held back for two years. I regret having been so foolish back then, not taking school seriously. Otherwise, I would have been able to choose a school with a leaving examination,” he admits.

Ever since he was six years old, football has been his passion, taking up all of his time. His parents worried about him neglecting school, but he did not listen to their admonition. He still plays for Šaca Football Club, which has made it to the third league. He still devotes much time to attending the training and the matches, but now he is wise enough to know that there are other priorities. To make things right, he plans to take the ninth-grade tests to be able to continue with his studies.

When the ETP Community Centre started in Košice-Šaca four years ago, Rišo got used to and enjoyed visiting it often. Yet, he had no clue what opportunities were awaiting him. Out of all activities, he most enjoyed the Music and Dance Club, where shows for younger kids were rehearsed and performed. Rišo became both a singer and a dancer, enjoying singing Roma songs above all.

“Roma songs are beautiful. They are coming from the heart. No words can describe their beauty; they need to be felt,” he says with sensibility.

Richard inherited his talent from his grandfather, who loved Roma songs. He used to tour nearby villages, singing to bring joy to the people.

Two years ago, ETP Slovakia invited the famous Roma singer, musician and choir master Ida Kellarová to visit the Šaca Community Centre. In search of new talent, she was impressed by the group of young singers in Šaca. She started rehearsing with them and giving them opportunities to perform. Later, she selected two boys for further work. Rišo Čisár was one of them.

“Aunt Ida is a second mother to me. She calls me Riško. After a couple of times that we had been together, she understood me. She could not believe that I had been retained in school twice... She is so kind-hearted. It is a pleasure to work with her,” he says.

During the last summer holidays, Richard spent an amazing and creative time in Lipany, together with Ida Kellarová and other musically gifted children from Slovakia and the Czech Republic as part of the Romano drom arts camp project. Under Ida’s lead, he performed at the opening concert for the project “Košice – the European Capital of Culture 2013,” which was held at the State Theatre in Košice. He also took the opportunity to perform at the Voices for Tomorrow concert at the Palace of Art in Košice, as well as at other concerts. The performance at the Prague Rudolfinum on the students’ day was an extraordinary experience; Ida’s children’s choir, Čhavorence, was accompanied by the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra.

“I am honored to have been admitted by Aunt Ida to sing in the choir. It has become world-famous, earning an invitation to New York. I sing the first voice at Čhavorence,” he says with pride.

Performing with the unique choir under the perfect lead of an extraordinary artist has generated in Richard the desire to study singing. He decided to apply to a musically-oriented high school, his parents supporting him saying: “Do what makes you happy.”

## THERE IS ALWAYS A CHANCE TO GO BACK AND START ANEW

**T**he infamous raid, in which police officers invaded the Budulovská settlement in Moldava nad Bodvou, led Milan Hudák to the decision to leave Slovakia. It took him five days to recover from the injuries he had suffered during the raid.

Milan, whom everyone calls Igor, is thirty one, but when he talks about all he has gone through, one would say that he has already lived his third life. There was a time when he was sniffing glue and stealing. There were times when he was starving, times when he was living in a juvenile detention centre, but also times when he was helping kids with their homework and helping younger children cope with the addiction to glue-sniffing.

“What has opened my eyes was the Crossroads education program organized by ETP Slovakia. One of the things I learned there was that even if you’re misled, there is always a chance to come back and start anew. That was exactly what I needed to hear; in spite of the many things I have done wrong, I still have a chance to become a good person,” Igor contemplates.

When he realized that there was also another way to live, he knew the biggest obstacle he was facing was the absence of education. He felt a great desire to study so he could work with kids. At that time he thought there was no way for him to acquire education. He was twenty five, having quit school in the fifth grade at the age of sixteen. Where was he supposed to go from here? Igor wasted a couple of years filling the void with dubious friends and disco nights.

As soon as the ETP Community Centre started in Moldava, he signed up for its education activities. Thanks to his good achievements, he was selected to take part in half-year training courses in antidrug and sex education, Roma history and Roma mediation. After completing the courses, Igor himself started teaching the local Roma youth and acting as a mediator between the Roma from the ghetto and public institutions.

“I did not only teach the twelve to sixteen year old kids what I had been taught to tell them; I described my own experience. That worked very well. I was guiding seven boys in the process of unlearning the glue-sniffing habits. According to the contract, I was supposed to spend two hours a week with the group, but we met daily, even during weekends. All that time was worth it; the boys have all returned from the wrong path, as I once had, and they live decent lives now.” The Project has already finished, but Igor still works with the local youth, helping them with homework.

Igor started sniffing glue in the fourth grade of primary school. His father was in jail and Igor’s mother had found it hard to handle the children on her own. She had only given them food when their neighbor had brought them something to eat. Igor had wanted to help and had done what a child’s mind had been telling him to do: to bring home money. He had earned it by selling stolen iron. He was caught stealing and placed in a reeducation centre. When Igor’s father was released from prison, having been detained unjustly, Igor’s life was already going in the wrong direction. His father was not able to avert the situation despite all the reasoning and slapping in the face. It was all pointless.

One of the activities organized in the Community Centre was the Slumdog Theatre. Igor was one of the actors, travelling to do the performances and meeting people who recognized his natural intelligence and aptitude for studying. “I will be happy to study, if you help me out,” he would respond.

It was not easy to find a school that would admit an adult student that had not finished primary education. But Igor managed to do it; he found a way to study part-time, though it was not easy. The first obstacle was the Slovak language because he used to study five years in the Hungarian language and spoke Roma at home. Within a single school year, he managed to pass three grades. It was an achievement that brought him tears of happiness. His parents, first having concerns due to their son’s past, were happy and proud in the end.

After that, Igor enrolled at a pedagogical school, but this time, it was an uphill battle. He understood neither the teachers lecturing in the Slovak language, nor the textbook texts.

Then came the unfortunate police raid, after which Igor decided to leave Slovakia. With help from his friends, he found a four-year study program at Dr. Ambedkar School in Sajókaza, the village in Borsod County in Hungary. The school is named after the Indian social reformist, who inspired the modern Buddhist movement. Igor is currently in the third grade, due to graduate next year.

“My classmates are seventeen. At first they laughed at me, but when they saw that I can act like a teenager too, eventually, they got to like me. I feel great among them,” he says.

He plans to spend one more year in Sajókaza to grasp the system of the school’s management. He intends to start a similar school in Slovakia. What he appreciates most of all is the attitude of the teachers; they provide the students with a wide spectrum of knowledge, show sincere interest in them and work with them even during weekends. They have noticed Igor’s extraordinary desire for knowledge and responded by devoting extra time to work with him.

“Next Sunday, the Principal is going to test me via Facebook. Each question has to be followed by an immediate response, leaving no room for cheating. I have to be well-prepared, I don’t want to be ashamed in front of the Principal,” he says.

Igor attends school Monday to Thursday. He stays in Sajókaza in a small house owned by the School, which he shares with two other students. There is a school computer available for him to work with. When in Moldava, Igor uses a computer at the Community Centre, as he does not have one of his own. He lives humbly, occupying twenty four square meters of a small housing complex. He shares the space with his father, sister and her three small children.

“I don’t want my children to be growing up in the settlement,” he points out.

“My next aim is to graduate and apply for a Hungarian university. In Slovakia, ideally in Moldava, I will establish a private school for socially excluded children. I don’t need much money; I only want as much as to be able to have decent housing and my own computer,” Igor talks about his ambitious plans.





**D**ávid Korčkovský remains faithful to his boyhood ideal: he wants to help people. To do it professionally, he studies to prepare for his future profession.

Dávid has attained a Bachelor's Degree at the Catholic University in Ružomberok and now continues in the Master's Program. He has already chosen the topic of his Diploma Thesis: The Analysis of Social Work in Selected Roma Settlements. The research will include the settlement in Podsadek in Stará Lubovňa, where he grew up and still lives today.

He is an excellent student, passing all of his exams with ease. "On the day of my State Exams, everyone in the settlement was keeping their fingers crossed for me. I appreciate the support from the local people," says the first university student from the settlement.

In the first grade, during the school practice at the department of social curatorship, the people from Podsadek visiting the office started to address him as Mister. "No need for that," he responded. Even the students he leads as a mentor of the ETP Photography and IT Workshop simply call him Dávid.

His first experience with the art of photography was when ETP lent the young people from the settlement cameras and provided a tutor, Slavo Kutaš, to guide them. Dávid soon became drawn to photography and, since then, his work has received positive response at various exhibitions. Presently, Dávid himself leads six young people interested in developing their photography skills. Making use of computers, they analyze all that they capture on cameras and discuss how to achieve even better images. The students appreciate Dávid's friendly and informal attitude.

"As soon as the weather gets warmer, we will go out to discover how to perceive and capture a landscape," Dávid talks about his plans.

Dávid became a youth leader when he was at secondary school. "I led a group of ten children and, together, we discussed mainly spiritual matters, such as the notion of sin, the ways to achieve a righteous life, the power of God's love, our mission in life and, of course, the importance of education. It was definitely worth it; all those students are studying at secondary schools now," Dávid says proudly.

After he graduates from University, Dávid wants to continue working with people. He does not like the approach taken by some students of social work, who leave the school to find an office job: "First I need to try the fieldwork, to see the bottom. I want to be out on the streets to listen to the people and see their real problems. I am convinced that without that, it is not possible to do social work."

Podsadek still remembers an honest field social worker who had to leave due to imposed restrictions related to qualification. The social worker was Dávid's grandfather. Maybe it was him who awakened in Dávid a sincere interest in people's problems.

Besides, Dávid is lucky to have wonderful parents who have always shown interest in their children and have talked to them a lot since their early childhood. "I have four siblings. Our parents used to speak with each of us in the Roma language up to the age of three and after that, we started speaking Slovak. They wanted us to grasp both languages," Dávid explains. At the age of twenty, he still returns to his childhood in his thoughts. His mother used to read him fairy tales.

He has been an excellent student since his early school years. He was the "smart kid" in his class and the only student from the settlement who was allowed to take his textbooks home. (Unfortunately, the practice of not letting Roma children take their textbooks home still prevails in many schools.)

Dávid has set three priorities in his life: education, employment and housing. He considers these things to be interconnected: the education will ensure employment, thanks to which Dávid will be able to provide decent housing. At present, Dávid lives with his parents and siblings in a large house with six rooms. Their parents have reconstructed the house thanks to the ETP Savings Program.

Dávid took to the idea of financial education and saving too. As soon as he reached adulthood, he started putting some of his pocket money aside to qualify for the bonus and be able to buy a laptop. He was the first person in the settlement to buy a computer - it was a huge thing! The idea of saving was spreading fast and soon other people in the settlement became interested too.

Dávid became busier in autumn of this year. He had studied the first three years of University in Stará Ľubovňa, but now he continues to study in Ružomberok. Every week, he leaves home on Sunday and only returns on Thursday night.

“In the dormitory, I live with non-Roma students and we get on very well. Among the full-time students, I am the only Roma in our class and everyone is all right with that. The first time I had ever got into a ‘white’ class was at the secondary school. I got scared, so I transferred to the bricklayers’ class, where several Roma students were studying. After one day, I had to go back; I just couldn’t stay there.”

At first, Dávid wanted to study at the Police Academy. However, it was at that time when a disturbed shooter killed an entire Roma family in Bratislava – Devínska Nová Ves. His mother was afraid to let him go to Bratislava and he did not feel safe to leave either. Therefore, he chose social work. Both schools have one common aim: to help and to protect people. Which way to take, in pursuit of the noble goal, depends on individual preference.

Dávid has got it all figured out; he wants his work to make sense. He wants to settle down with his family in Stará Ľubovňa and devote his time to the people from Podsadek. He is single but taken; his girlfriend is beautiful and intelligent.







He was thirteen when he first held a camera in his hands. Now twenty-two, he has had his photographs displayed at several exhibitions and his video featured on YouTube. Still, he is aiming higher:

“My dream is for a movie directed by a Roma to appear in cinemas,” says Karol Horváth from Moldava nad Bodvou. He counts on his movie to be the one.

“When a person is really determined, he can accomplish anything,” Karol is convinced.

His first experience with a camera was during the Creative Photography Workshop of ETP Slovakia that was held within the project called Community Bridge Building in Central and Eastern Slovakia.

“If it had not been for the instructor Slávo Kutaš, I would never have learned about real life in a Roma settlement,” Karol says.

Karol has never had to live in a settlement; he grew up in town. On the contrary, his mother Irma Horváthová knows the Budulovská settlement very well; she has worked there as a leader of the Community Centre. Her father and siblings still live there. Irma has managed to save her four children from the misery of living in the settlement and, together with her husband, has provided them with adequate living conditions.

It was through the Photography Workshop that Karol started getting a notion of what it means to live “there”.

The ETP instructor encouraged boys and girls from marginalized Roma communities to try to capture everyday lives of the settlers; their routine, habits, way of life, joy and sorrow; to search for distinctive moments and become the mediators of the experience that cannot be gained any other way. Handing out simple compact cameras to tens of young photographers resulted in hundreds of diverse images – from simple to extraordinary, from poor to nearly artistic ones; robust tattooed arms bathing a baby’s tiny body, a walker’s figure fading out on the horizon, a funny old man sticking out his tongue, children using cooking pots as drums or playing hockey, people’s religious rituals, lots of nooks and crannies of the settlers’ dwellings... The best of these photographs were displayed at exhibitions and used to illustrate the first volume of *From Our Lives*. Karol’s images were among the best.

“It took hundreds of snapshots to create two or three quality images. I have learned to use computers for photo editing, and what is most important, practiced to be able to see the world through the lens of a camera,” Karol recalls.

When he started visiting the settlement, he was shocked by what he saw there. As he was trying to grasp the unbelievable reality, he was haunted more and more by the question ‘why?’. Today he has friends among the local people, but he still does not understand a lot of connections in their lives... Therefore, he keeps on searching. By Slávo’s example he gathers around himself girls and boys from the settlement, hands them out cameras – simple but also professional ones – and encourages them to capture everything they see. The results are striking; five persons sleeping in one bed, people peeling potatoes in their shacks, barefooted settlers in the snow, people dragging water home...

“A person who has never had to experience a day without eating will not understand the ability of the people to laugh against all the odds. Their faces laugh, but their eyes say something else... The expression on the faces of the children living in the settlement screams for help. Yet, not everybody is able to see it. The photojournalists visiting the settlement usually see the rubbish and toluene bags... They do not search for the reasons behind... I am sorry to hear some people speak of the Roma from the settlement as parasites. The settlers do not feed off other people; in fact, they just struggle to survive...”

After the end of the Creative Workshop, Karol continued to practice photography. He was becoming increasingly interested in learning about the art of photography and studied on his own to gain further knowledge. At the time he applied for the Private Secondary School of Film Arts in Košice, he had already produced a 30-minute film on the Slumdog Theatre.

“It took six months to shoot the film. During that period, I spent a lot of time with the actors in the settlement, at school and in various other situations. I accompanied them to their performances to capture their experience, feelings and such paradoxes as sleeping at hotels vs. in their shacks at home...” Karol explains.

At the Film Arts School he decided to become a filmmaker. He excelled at the technical subjects, yet lagged behind in the general ones. Before, he had attended a Hungarian primary school, so he was not able to speak Slovak very well. When financial hardships occurred in his family, the tuition at a private school ceased to be affordable for the family with four children. Therefore, Karol applied for the transfer to the part-time study program to be able to earn money besides studying. However, he was denied the transfer due to his poor performance in general subjects.

“It was very hard for me to leave the school. It gave me a lot; I attended all the courses, worked with quality equipment and was led by excellent teachers. I was the only Roma at school and everybody was all right with that... I may still apply for further study at the school after graduation or study filmmaking at a university,” Karol continues.

Karol has found employment at U.S. Steel, where his job is to sort out bricks. At the same time, he studies at a grammar school in Hungary; he is in the third grade and he is doing very well.

He hardly spends a day without filming or taking photographs. He currently participates in the Video Volunteers workshop, where his role is to shoot video in the settlement. Along with the work of professional artists, his black-and-white photographs were exhibited at the Médium Gallery in Bratislava as part of the event called Časť bez účasti (A Part Without Participation), whose main focus was the issue of segregated and disadvantaged Roma communities.

Together with two Roma friends, grammar school students from Moldava, Nikolas and Kristián Filka, Karol has established a Civic Association called Roma Filmmakers in order to create a foundation for Roma film production. Their studio and office is currently based in a garage. The Association also provides their photo services to the public and invests all they earn in buying new equipment. The group has a Facebook page and its videos enjoy many views.

“The happiest day of my life so far has been the one when I bought my first reflex camera with my own money. The second happiest day will be the one I buy a good computer.”

Besides photography and filmmaking Karol writes screenplays, dialogues and reflections. He strives to understand the reason why the Roma have been living this way for entire generations; why the old and the young alike experience the indefinable feelings of sorrow; how their deep emotions, so visible in Roma songs, come to life... So far he has learned that there are two groups of Roma; those who have already started working on themselves and those who have not started yet.

Karol searches on...





This is the story of three sisters: Pavlína, Helga and Marianna. When the ETP Community Centre started in their town thirteen years ago, Pavlína was fourteen, Helga twelve and Marianna nine years old. All of them would visit the Centre, the younger daughters engaging in almost all its activities daily. They got used to studying and doing their homework there on a regular basis. In turn, they were rewarded by good grades at school. Their desire for new knowledge and determination to accomplish something in their lives were growing; and all three sisters have succeeded. The mother of the girls used the Community Centre's counseling services.

"Most of all, I enjoyed the PC club," Pavlína recalls. She had attended it up until she was able to buy her own laptop. At home, she is constantly connected to the Internet to check her e-mails, messages and Facebook.

"It's a pity my younger daughters don't have the Internet connection in Austria. Otherwise, we could be in constant touch," says the mother of the girls, Helga, who keeps pace with her daughters in using modern technology.

It is only over the phone that she is updated on how her girls are doing in a foreign land. She misses them so much. This spring they left home in search of a better-paying job. Both of them had obtained a Care Assistant Training Course and, together, they now take care of an elderly schizophrenic man in the Tyrolean countryside. The job is demanding; the client, who is unable to move at times, is keeping both of them busy.

"His health condition has improved since they started taking care of him; he does not have fits any more. His family is fascinated; they like the girls and are happy to see their father become more cheerful. They praise them for being excellent cooks, for ironing and taking care of the household, which is beyond their duties," the mother explains. She is glad that Helga and Marianna work together. If they were separated, she would be concerned about them. She misses them and the girls miss their family too. They wish so much they could stay home and earn decent money...

"I have devoted all my life and all my love to my daughters," Helga confesses.

"When the eldest daughter started going to school, I broke up with my husband. The reason was his alcoholism. Before he fell for it completely, he had a job, he liked us and was able to take care of everything in the house. We respected each other."

Helga married out of great love. She was a beautiful bride. She was nineteen and the groom ten years older. However, his non-Roma family was not happy about him marrying a Roma woman. It was only when he started giving in to alcohol that they began wishing for the couple to remain together. Unfortunately, there was no way back any more. Helga later discovered that her husband had an alcohol problem even before they met. He was holding up only while they were together.

After they parted, she received no news from him for years. He also ceased to pay child support; he had left for the Czech Republic.

Helga remained alone with three daughters and would never find another man again; she did not want to in the first place, but it was extremely difficult for her to manage to feed three growing girls and provide everything necessary for them. She was performing the so-called activation works, having to survive on the very little she earned.

"I don't remember that period," says the eldest daughter Pavlína, not wanting to remember the sad times...

All three girls were raised by their mother to grow up into beautiful and educated women. The eldest daughter is a qualified confectioner, the middle daughter is a baker and the youngest one a waitress. Although they were doing well at school, they never even dreamed of attaining higher education. They needed to start working and earning money as soon as possible. They were always able to find work; sometimes nearby, other times farther in Košice. The younger daughters plan to use the money they earn to study abroad. Besides, they want to help their older sister. After some time, they would like to open their own business to gain independence, never again having to rely on anyone else.

The family used to live in a rental flat in the town centre. When the Municipality started the reconstruction of their block of flats, it relocated its inhabitants in the newly-built low-standard houses three kilometers away from the town. All of these people were Roma, left to face the isolation.

“It was a bad place for living; for a long time we didn’t even have a bus stop. The houses are located on former swampland, so we constantly struggled with beetles and mold on the walls,” Helga complains. She is concerned about her sick mother, who has remained living there; she is over seventy and constantly needs medical help. “Tell me, how could I find her some accommodation in the town?” she asks.

When the family was moving out of town into the low-standard house, Pavlína was already married and her son was two months old. No matter how caring the parents were, they could not save the child from insect bites.

Pavlína and her husband took fast action and, within half a year, they bought an older house in the town. They reconstructed it, bought nice new furniture and moved in when the boy was two years old. The entire family came to live in the new house: the young couple with the baby, mother Helga, and sisters Helga and Marianna. Their present living standard is incomparably better than the one of the swampland. Their current house is modern, spacious and comfortable, with a doctor’s office and several shops nearby.

“We have tried to manage our money wisely from the beginning. My husband’s family has helped us financially, and we also took up a bank loan,” Pavlína explains.

She met her husband during a visit to her relatives living in the Czech Republic. The man comes from a decent half-Roma family. He studied to become a shop assistant and has always had a job and regular income. After their marriage, they settled in Pavlína’s hometown. He started doing woodwork and managed to maintain the job. His young family is thriving, and soon it is going to welcome a second child. After that, the family is not going to have any more children.

“Once Helga and Marianna start their own families, I will have to split in three; each of them would like to have me around,” Helga laughs at the nice part of it all.

Yet, she is set on fulfilling one more task: to revive her old music band. She is a daughter of a renowned musician, plays the keyboard and the guitar, and she sings nicely.

Helga’s husband returned to the town at the time their daughters were already grown up. He became homeless and the girls would sometimes give him money on the street. One day he was admitted to a hospital with hypothermia and died shortly after...

But life goes on.

The story intentionally leaves out the name of the town, in which the family lives. The names of the characters have been changed as well. The mother and the daughters have gone through tough years and none of them would like to be recognized by the readers. What is important in the story is the courage with which they managed to get over their sorrow.

## RECAPITULATION OF STORIES

Verona is an elderly hard-working woman, a mother of several children, all of whom attended various activities at the local Community Centre. Many of her family members also used ETP microloans to improve the quality of their housing.

Rišo has discovered inside a great talent for and love towards Roma songs. He sings in an international choir led by an excellent choir master he met at the Community Centre. He plans to continue studying music.

A whole world has changed for a former addict, Milan Igor, who had quit school in the fifth grade, when he finished the Crossroads training course at the Community Centre. He is going to graduate from secondary school next year and he is aiming for university afterwards. He would like to establish an education institution for socially excluded youth.

Dávid is the first university student in the settlement. As he was growing up, the Community Centre played a significant role in his development. At the same time, he is lucky to have had parents who took exemplary care of him and to have engaged in the local parish activities, which gave him invaluable work experience. Dávid wants to become the same kind of a social worker he has been fortunate to meet on his career path.

Karol is a passionate photographer and filmmaker, who wants to lay the groundwork for Roma movie production. He first held a camera in his hands as a teenager at the Community Centre. Since then, he has used it to capture both sad and beautiful images of the settlement. In addition, he devotes his time to working with young photographers.

Helga's three daughters have been very successful in their lives and they still have many ambitious plans. Their mother had a tough time raising them alone. The girls attended the Community Centre daily, while their mother used its counseling services.

The Community Centres played a significant role in these and many other stories. What would the lives of these people have become, had it not been for the Community Centres?



## **LONG-TERM PROVISION OF COMPREHENSIVE INTEGRATED SERVICES, INCLUDING EDUCATION, IN COMMUNITY CENTRES<sup>1</sup>**

Since 2001, ETP Slovakia has been verifying the approach of providing comprehensive social services in nearly forty Community Centres. All of them have been based close to impoverished Roma communities and have employed educated, versatile and experienced professionals. Today, it is a widely held view the community centres are vital in empowering marginalized Roma communities (MRCs). Although the community centres have been operated in Slovakia for over fifteen years, the precise scope of their services and activities has yet to be defined.

Since January 2015, the Implementing Agency of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, and Family has launched the National Project of Community Centres within which more than 150 community centres have been established.

Our rich experience indicates that to ameliorate the current conditions in the MRCs, it is necessary to ensure continuous provision of comprehensive social services. Hence, we **recommend that the scope of the mandatory, as well as voluntary services to be provided within the National Project of Community Centres is clearly defined.** The more varied the offer of community centre services, the better the chances that individual needs of clients are met.

The recommended mandatory services include:

- Social Counseling, Field Social Work and Field Health Care Assistance
- Early Intervention Programs (pre-primary education from the age of three)
- Financial Literacy Education (for children and adults)
- Health Awareness Programs (for children and adults)
- Employment Counseling and Employment Integration Services
- Social and Housing Services
- School Preparation for children, youth and adults
- Extra-curricular activities (PC, Reading & Computing, Music, Dance, Drama Clubs, Creative Workshops)
- Mentoring and Tutoring

We suggest that the voluntary services include activities reflecting the needs and interests of a particular community – spiritual and pastoral activities, low-threshold activities, club activities for mothers and parents, to name but a few.

We are outraged that after less than one year of implementation of the National Project of Community Centres, funded by the European Social Fund, the Project terminated at the end of 2015. More than one hundred local authorities across Slovakia set up community centers and created jobs for hundreds of professional staff to provide services in (usually) newly built premises, also funded from European sources. **Termination or interruption of vital comprehensive social and educational services in community centres may easily disrupt trust between a client and their local social worker, as it creates an impression of public indifference.**

<sup>1</sup> The proposal is in line with the Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Integration of Roma up to 2020, Priority Area D.2.2 Employment, Partial Goal 4: Supporting social integration using also the support of terrain social work and activity of community centers in municipalities with a high percentage of members of marginalized Roma communities, for consultancy services, education and leisure activities.





## A GIRL AND HER GRANDMOTHER: RAISING GENERATIONS OF COMMUNITY CHILDREN

**E**mília Horváthová was raised as a “community child.” Today she is nineteen years old. A year after she enrolled at the zero grade of primary school, a kindergarten opened in Rudňany and ETP Slovakia commenced its activities in the locality. In 2006, the Community Centre was opened in the village. Emília enjoyed visiting it regularly. She used to live only a few meters away with her grandmother, Kveta Berkyová. Emília’s parents lived among the non-Roma, where it was hard for Emília to find any friends.

The Community Centre is still only a few steps away and Emília now walks her three-year-old son Ervín to attend the activities there. Together, with her son and husband, they live in a “flat” neighboring the grandmother’s. The small room they occupy is free of charge. “These premises are not classified as habitable; whoever decides to live there does so at their own peril,” Kveta explains.

The room has no chimney, but its previous inhabitants had made their own flue. The family now uses a wood-burning stove for heating. To bathe, they need to go to their grandmother’s, who has used the savings and the microloan provided by ETP to buy a hot water heater and provide running water.

Emília’s husband, Ervín, is Rudňany’s “community child” too. In the Community Centre, they still keep the pictures of him engaged in their sporting activities. Emília and Ervín have known each other since their childhood. They had always been friends, but it was at the secondary school in Bijacovce that it started being serious between the two of them. At the school, Ervín acquired the qualification of a logger and forester. Emília has not finished school because, in the first grade, she became pregnant and left her studies. She was ashamed to continue going to school with a growing belly. After giving birth, she had to take care of her child and there was no time left for school.

Emília has become a caring mother, who walks her son to the Community Centre every single day to attend the pre-school preparation. Everything he learns in the Centre, they continue practising at home. “We were given cubes which we could take home; we use them to build whatever we can think of – a house, a tower, a bridge. We revise poems and songs, we draw and play,” she talks about the time she spends with her son proudly. At the same time, she recalls her own childhood in the Community Centre: “It is the same place where I was studying, doing homework and where I met my mentor. I was doing well at school and I wanted to continue studying. Now that my son is older, I would like to go back to school. When I was a student, we used to craft jewellery, bells, candle holders and other items from copper wire. Later I attended a training course for young mothers, where we were taught such things as how to bathe a child. At the parents’ training we learned how to protect ourselves from unwanted pregnancy; it is thanks to the course that we have had only one child so far. My husband attended the courses too, and later also became the lecturer; he started teaching the drug prevention and sex education courses.”

Yet the Horváth family is seriously considering the option of leaving for England. “My husband cannot find a job here, so we only live on social benefits. My parents have lived in England for eight months; my father has a good job and a decent house, so they would be able to help us there,” says Emília.

Kveta Berkyová is an extraordinary grandmother. She is sixty one and she plans to resume studying to pass her secondary school leaving examination. For several years, she has been a tutor of various clubs in the Community Centre, including singing, traditional Roma dance, and even hip-hop. All of today’s “community children” love her. She has raised five of her own children and, moreover, she also has fifty one grandchildren and seventeen great-grand children. She is also a full-time Health Awareness Assistant.

“Since I started this job, we have experienced no problems with the vaccination of children and the mothers started to care much more about the health of their children. The local people trust me. When someone gets sick, I accompany them to the health center and I check if they follow the doctors’ recommendations,” Kveta explains.

When she was young, Kveta wanted to become a nurse. She noticed very early on how badly the local Roma lived and she wanted to help them as well as all other people. Kveta always had her nose in a book and her school performance was excellent. Her mother supported her in her study path and, therefore, did not insist on her doing the housework.

When Kveta Berkyová talks about her parents, her words are full of love and gratitude. Her mother used to go to school for a while but not for long enough to learn to read and write. However, Kveta's father never went to school but learned to read on his own.

“He would find some old newspapers, pick one letter and keep asking people around him what it meant. As soon as he learned more letters, he started to join them into words. Gradually, he was able to read entire books and he became a wonderful storyteller. It was at the time there was no such thing as a TV. He would be seated as a king on a throne, and people would listen to him for hours, holding their breath in amazement. The Roma have always loved long fairy tales,” Kveta remembers of her eighty-five-year-old father, who spent most of his life working in a mine and is in a wheelchair now.

Kveta was not admitted to medical high school due to the lack of vacancies. She enrolled in the industrial high school but it was not right for her, so she left. Instead, she took a half-year healthcare training course and found a job at the Red Cross afterwards.

She had married out of pure love and together with her husband, they had a beautiful marriage. Unfortunately, it did not last long. At the age of thirty seven, Kveta's husband died and she never found another man again. She was left alone with five children; the eldest was fourteen and the youngest was six. They lived in the settlement in Rudňany with the nearest source of drinking water three kilometers away. A mining-related landslide, which happened only a few meters from their house, created a deep ditch, which signaled that they were living in a high-risk area. Kveta alarmed the authorities as well as the media, but had to wait for the relocation until the mine ceased its operation and the Municipality reconstructed its former administrative building to function as a block of flats. Kveta was allocated a flat with a bedroom, a kitchen and running water. It was the same flat which she lives in today.

“I cannot invite all my children and grandchildren to come for a visit on a same day because the flat is too small to accommodate us all,” she laughs.

Kveta's flat has been a place to study for several generations of children, whom Kveta has helped with homework assignments. It was also frequently visited by adults needing help with paperwork.

Kveta also volunteered for a Dutch foundation, which later employed her. Then she took up a course for teacher assistants at primary level and found a job at the school in Rudňany.

“During the three years that I worked at the school, the children would not skip classes. In the morning, I picked them up from the settlement and brought them back after school. I bought them snacks with my own money. During the breaks, I was tutoring them. It all lasted until one day when the Principal told me that I had to leave. In order to continue, I would have to have a university degree,” she says. The local women protested, but to no effect,” Kveta explains.

Kveta Berkyová is an authority in the settlement. When she invited the local women to join her at the sewing, knitting and needlecraft courses, they were happy to follow and mesmerized by the beauty of the art they created with their own hands. Currently, Kveta is trying to persuade the women to enroll in the secondary school to graduate with her.

“**T**he teachers of the local school still keep asking me why our eldest son Ladislav has not finished secondary school and applied for university,” says Ladislav Kaleja-Januv from Ostrovany.

The boy was a good student, mainly receiving A’s and rarely a B or a C. He studied in Sabinov to become a car mechanic. Afterwards, he wanted to continue studying to be able to graduate, but when his friends did not apply for further study, neither did he. There is not much value placed on education in his settlement.

“Now I know it was a silly thing to do,” says the local community worker, twenty-eight-year-old Ladislav Kaleja-Januv Jr., who was selected for the position from among many of applicants.

Lately, Ladislav and his wife Kveta were happy when their son Ladislav Jr. and daughter Janka told them that they were both going to continue their studies. Janka studied to become a cook. Currently she works as a cleaner. She moved to Jarovnice after marrying her husband, and since they do not have their own children, they have applied for adoption. Kveta and Ladislav have one more son, Ján, who has a ten-year-old son, and daughter Zuzana, who has worked as an assistant in the local kindergarten since the beginning of this school year. Zuzka is the first one in the family to ever graduate.

Ladislav Jr. and Zuzana are both single and they live in the settlement in a decent brick house with their parents. Their parents built the house themselves over twenty years ago, adding a bathroom five years later. They have recently used the ETP savings to legalize the house and the ETP microloan to provide insulation and build a toilet room.

“This house will be inherited by Ladislav Jr. Among us Roma it is not common for a person to pay off all their siblings’ shares to buy the parents’ house out. The house simply goes to the child that needs it and everyone is all right with that,” says the father of the family.

The parents considered all their children and have concluded they have all been provided for. Janka has moved to a nice house belonging to her husband’s parents. Ján has used the savings and the microloan to reconstruct the house of his wife’s parents and moved in with their family. Zuzka is going to marry her boyfriend, after which they are going to build their own house.

Ladislav and Kveta got married at the age of eighteen, when Ladislav was due to enlist. The young wife was working in horticulture and saving money to prepare for the children to come. Their first child was born three years into their marriage and another three children afterwards.

Ladislav Sr. started working in construction when he was fifteen years old. That was common in those days. Later, he found a better paid job on the railways.

“It was hard work. We were constantly out working on the lines. Yet, it wasn’t the same as casting mortar at the construction site; this time we had to use our heads too, and this is what I liked about it. I did not skip a single day of work. I went to work even when I had the flu because I couldn’t stand just being at home,” says Ladislav Sr.

One day, after years of hard labor at the railways, he became sick and the doctor diagnosed him with heart disease. He was moved to work in the warehouse, where he remained until staff reductions commenced.

It was a tough task for Ladislav to find a new profession that he would be able to perform, considering he had heart disease and was receiving disability allowance. He did not succeed in finding a job, so the family had to live only on his pension. After a couple of years, his disability benefits stopped despite no improvement in his health condition. He ended up among the jobseekers at the labor office, which resulted in him having to perform public utility services.

“No one ever asked me if I was fit to work. There are days I cannot find enough strength to get out of the house and my wife stays home because she is worried about me. Besides my heart disease, I have also had problems with my stomach, kidneys, spine and prostate,” he complains.

Ladislav is unhappy about his condition. He so much wishes he could regain his strength and do any type of work, no matter how hard. When he was young, even physically demanding work used to bring him joy.

Ladislav Kaleja-Januv was born in the settlement in Ostrovany into a family with fourteen children. They used to live in a house of clay. All of his siblings worked hard as long as they had opportunities. Nowadays, the situation is very miserable. The unemployment rate in the settlement reaches ninety five to ninety nine per cent, depending on the season. The situation is a little better in the summer, when there are construction jobs available.

Ladislav and Kveta are very happy that three out of their four children are employed. Only Ján does not have a stable job, but he takes every chance for a part-time job that he can.

Kveta comes from Ostrovany as well. She has six siblings and her sister is married to Ladislav's brother. Both sisters are satisfied with their lives.

Ladislav used to be a great football player when he was young. His team chose him to be their treasurer. Later, he decided to establish a student team. As he received no support from the Municipality, he had to find his own way. He would sell beer during the matches and use the money earned to run the team. When the young Roma players started to do well, they were awarded a grant by members of the local government.

"The team is still together. With better support, they would be able to make it to the higher league," Ladislav Sr. says, proud about his work.

"It is important to start working with the people from their early years," he says.

That is the way he raised his own children. When they started going to school, they already knew a few letters as well as some math, such as multiplication. They had been raised on fairy tales, walks and play. Their father was more moderate, while their mother was more strict, both of them having been just. To their children they are still a symbol of diligence.

The parents work daily on their little farm – they take care of poultry and pigs, and they grow vegetables in the garden. When the husband feels weak, his wife takes over, and the children help as well.







**A**ngela Mirgová and her husband Peter gave two names to their son: Timotej Angel. The first name was chosen out of admiration for St. Timothy from early Christian times. Obviously, the second name was chosen for its angelic denotation. Both Angela and Peter are deeply religious.

Angela comes from the settlement in Podsadek in Stará Ľubovňa and Peter is from Lomnička. Ever since they got married, they have been living with Peter's parents in Lomnička. "I have a wonderful mother-in-law. I first met Peter at a gospel festival. Our chaplain took us to Lomnička and local people invited us for a visit. When I first met Peter's mother, she told her son that I was the kind of daughter-in-law she wished for. At that time, she did not know that there was a bond of love shaping between Peter and I...

We had a proper Roma-style wedding," Angela recalls. The ceremony was held in the bride's birthplace, at the church in Podsadek. The bride's guests were celebrating the wedding in the nearby village of Hniezdne, where the bride and the groom stayed until midnight. After midnight, they moved to Spišská Belá, where the groom's guests had been expecting them. Together, they celebrated until dawn. The bride was wearing a long white wedding dress. Later, she changed into an evening dress.

Angela was in the second year at university when she got married. She was studying social work at the Catholic University in Ružomberok. From the very beginning, she enjoyed the study program and decided she would become a field social worker. However, with the onset of pregnancy and associated health problems, she had to quit school. Fortunately, not forever; she only interrupted her studies. The following school year, she returned to the university and her husband was the one to take parental leave.

Peter is a bricklayer, but he also has inclination for work with people. Before his parental leave, he had worked in a free time centre. He supports his wife in her path towards completing her education. Together, they are considering that, after Angela graduates, Peter will apply for university as well. "My husband is worth his weight in gold," Angela says.

Their son is two years old. They teach him two languages; Slovak and Roma, because they want him to speak both. Peter's mother helps them raise their son, although she is ill and has to use a breathing device. Above all, she would like the young family to stay with her forever. Even so, when Peter and Angela got the opportunity to buy a house in Podolíneč, she did not stand in their way. In fact; parents on both sides contributed an equal amount of money to support their plan.

"Staying with Peter's parents is free of charge and we are, therefore, able to save money for a new house," Angela explains. Peter has ten siblings. One of his brothers studies at university and the rest commute to work in a quarry in Western Slovakia.

Angela has five siblings. All of them were good students, but none of them had straight A's like Angela did. Her brother Gustáv had chosen an interesting study program – Smithcraft – but has not yet found a corresponding job.

"Our parents raised us well from early childhood. Our mother used to talk with us a lot and our father often used to take us on trips. With the beginning of community work and spiritual life in Podsadek, the spiritual atmosphere carried over into family life and in to the settlement. Our family was enriched, we became even closer and we started to talk about our feelings," she continues.

Angela was already leading an active lifestyle in secondary school. As an animator, she led a group of younger students. Under the leadership of an ETP tutor, she also became good at photography. Her pictures of children and sport were praised by the world-renowned photographer Yuri Dojč. Upon reaching adulthood, she entered the ETP Savings Program. The money she saved, and the match-funding granted by ETP, were used to build an attic in her parents' house, where she intended to settle down. At that time, her parents were doing a large-scale reconstruction of their house, using the money saved as well as the ETP microloan. Her parents later returned the money Angela used to build the attic.

"I had taken a secondary school leaving examination in the Marketing study program, so it was easy for me to open a grocery store in our house. It is still the first and only shop in the settlement and it is doing quite well. Our parents-in-law have a shop in Lomnička too and I help them there as well" she says.

Angela considers family and school to be her priorities now. At the moment, all she can think about is her Bachelor's Thesis. She is writing it on Volunteering in Social Services. "During my research, I have found out that there are three main reasons that lead a person to volunteer: people either just want to help, they are inspired by friends who volunteer, or they do it out of boredom, looking for some activity to do. Regardless of the initial motivation, people usually come to like volunteering and eventually stick to it," Angela says.

When Angela was considering whether to continue studying at the Master's level, her husband supported her. His mother even threatened that she would throw her out of the house if she did not continue to study... "I still don't know if I will continue studying full-time or transfer to a part-time program. The primary school in Lomnička has offered me a job as a social worker starting in September," Angela continues.

Either way, she wants to do fieldwork – she wants to work with people. During her school practice in Bratislava, she had the chance to work with the homeless as well as with abused women. The experience convinced her of the high importance of social work, which she has chosen for her profession. At school, they were learning the art of observation – on the street, at school, in various situations. She has realized that "one can learn a lot by observing, and a good social worker needs to be a good observer."

The house that Peter and Angela bought in Podolíneč has seven rooms. They cannot move in yet because the required repairs are extensive. The house lies in the historic zone, so all the work is subject to approval from authorities. They do not intend to keep the house exclusively to themselves. "A part of our house will serve some social purpose. We would like to use it to help people. We haven't yet decided whether this will include kids, women or some other group..."

With this aim in mind, Angela and Peter are planning to take part in a training course to study the methods of working with people in need of assistance.

**W**ith a black uniform, handcuffs attached to his belt, a truncheon, and a badge of Roma Civilian Patrol on his chest, Milan Žaludek, a member of the Patrol, performs his rounds of all four settlements in Krompachy.

Milan started out as a volunteer in the Riot Police ten years ago. He soon got to like the job of enforcing order and gained respect among the local people. He was unemployed at that time, so when the Patrol started, he applied for a post there.

Before that, he had tried several jobs. Right after finishing primary school, he found work as an operator at the local SEZ manufacturing company. His duty was to operate a battery-powered truck to assemble the goods for shipping.

After that, he was long employed as a gravedigger. “It was a sad job, but it was relatively well-paid. We used to dig graves, build tombs, maintain the footpaths at the cemetery, and so on. It’s a pity they laid us off,” he says.

For some time afterwards, Milan operated a jackhammer in a surface mine. “It meant performing hard labor for little money. The jackhammer weighed fifteen to twenty kilos; my entire body was shaking while I was operating it,” Milan describes the job that he also lost.

His current job is the best so far. “I wish I could remain in the Patrol until retirement,” Milan continues. There are ten years left until he reaches the retirement age. He needs the job; he has eight children, three of whom are still at primary school. One of his sons attends a vocational school in Prakovce, and there is also an eighteen-year-old daughter and her child living with the parents. “One can hardly save any money with so many children,” Milan admits.

“If I had money, I would extend my house. I would manage to do it myself with the help of my brother-in-law, who is a professional bricklayer,” he says. Milan’s family shares a small house with the family of his sister. The house was bought earlier by his grandparents. It consists of a room occupied by the Žaludek family, a common kitchen and a pantry inside the house, and a toilet outside. To provide water, the family has to bring it in from a well. “Some of our children sleep in the kitchen with my sister because there is not enough space in our room any more. We try to adjust to each other’s needs.” Milan has four siblings, so he is yet to go through property settlement.

The local people are not charitable souls. Even parents lend their own children money with interest. Outside families, the interest rates are even higher. Usury thrives but, unfortunately, it is impossible to prove. Poverty has caused some of the Roma in Krompachy to get on a wrong path. Some of them became the victims of human trafficking abroad; others have allegedly become involved in organizing the illegal trade. However, this type of unlawful action is beyond the reach of Roma Civilian Patrols.

“There are eight of us in the Patrol taking turns in eight-hour shifts. One of us always keeps guard of the Community Centre, which my children used to attend as well. Two of us patrol the settlements: Stará maša, Družstevná, Farské lúky, and Hornádska. We keep watch of the settlements day and night, summer and winter, regardless of the weather. For the winter, we are going to get new coats...” Milan describes what it is like to be a part of the Patrol.

“We are not bogey men. We rather try to help and give advice. Yet, we have to be firm when it comes to certain boys. Twelve to fourteen-year-old rascals who are sniffing glue can hardly be changed by nice words. These cases are dealt with in collaboration with the Municipal Police. There are cases of families having their benefits stopped due to their problem children... Our truncheons are used in exceptional cases only; to cope with aggressive people. We usually deal with conflicts between family members and neighbors. Sometimes we deal with fights too but, in the settlement, it goes like this: one day, the men fight; the next day they go back to being friends... We also watch out for the children playing and laying on the road. This is dangerous because the road leads to the industrial zone. There is no use talking to the mothers, we have to be warding the children off the road over and over again...”

Since Milan Žaludek became a member of Roma Civilian Patrol, he has achieved better status among the people living in the settlement; the uniform and the badge evoke their respect.

“We were among the first Roma families to ever move in to Hornádska Street to live among the non-Roma,” Milan says. “We had a good time living there. There were fruit trees growing along the river, they all blossomed in spring and bore fruit in summer. We were friends with the white kids and we frequently visited each other. It all changed in the course of time, however, and the non-Roma left. The situation started to be critical about ten years ago, when the Municipality destroyed the settlement at Banická quarter and relocated its inhabitants to Hornádska. The quarter had been situated close to a hospital and the noise produced by its inhabitants had disturbed the patients. The incomers have brought their way of life with them. They cut out the trees to use them as fuel. Before that, they had lived by the forest, in isolation, with almost no contact with the majority.”

The difficult housing situation of the Žaludek family got even worse due to the flood. Five years ago, their house was completely flooded by water, which destroyed everything: clothing, documents, food – all was gone. The house remained with cracks on the walls and a thick layer of mud inside. Snakes came out, mold appeared on the walls and the floor rotted off.

“We purchased cement, brought sand from the river and repaired the entire house. We got new furnishing and equipment, using the state subsidy of a thousand Euros.”

The children of Milan Žaludek are average students. The father never even thought about studying with them. They never bring any homework, leaving all their textbooks at school. This is a common practice when it comes to children from settlements.







## RECAPITULATION OF STORIES

Emília and her husband Ervín are happy to walk their three-year-old son to the Community Centre in which they were once raised themselves. Emília brings her son to the Centre to attend the pre-school preparation classes, and in the afternoon they keep practicing all he has learned at home. The boy's grandmother Kveta worked as a Tutor of several clubs in the Community Centre. In her sixties she is still a student.

Ladislav and Kveta raised their children on fairy tales and games. Their children now pass their experience on to the next generation; the youngest daughter is a kindergarten teacher. The family serves as a role model and an inspiration for the settlement. Their example helps promote the idea that it is important to work with children from their early years.

As a student, Angela was excited about everything that expanded the boundaries of her knowledge. The spirit of community work has spread to her entire family; it has brought them even closer, which motivated her to study social work at university. Sharing the same priorities with her husband, they want to use their large house to start providing social services.

Milan is a good-natured, diligent and moral man, courageously taking care of his large family. His children find a good example in their father, yet he has never even thought about helping them study. In a settlement, it is just not a common thing to do.

These stories are accounts of what follows when parents take good care of their children from their early years or neglect them.

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## RECOMMENDATION No. 2

### **INTRODUCTION OF COMPULSORY PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN FROM MARGINALIZED ROMA COMMUNITIES (MRCs) FROM THE AGE OF THREE<sup>2</sup>**

Adequate stimulation of children's development from the day they are born is essential for their successful integration into the formal education process. Children who are raised to live in permanently bad socio-economic conditions are subjected to stimuli of a different nature than desired, and therefore, their skills and abilities develop to the extent that is different compared with their peers from the majority. As the language of instruction in schools is Slovak, it is necessary for the children who speak the Roma language at home to **have both the possibility and the obligation to be enrolled into pre-primary education facilities from the age of three**. Giving them such opportunity today will lay the foundation for their future success at school, work and all other spheres of life.

For pedagogues teaching children from MRCs, it is also important to be **qualified mediators**. **A mediator is a teacher who not only possesses professional teaching skills and good knowledge of the socio-economic environment in which the children are being brought-up, but is also able to adequately respond to individual differences among pupils and knows how to assist them in overcoming barriers to education.**

## RECOMMENDATION No. 3

### **ORGANIZING COMMON EDUCATION ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN WITHIN PRE-SCHOOL CLUBS<sup>3</sup>**

Successful integration of children from MRCs into the process of formal education to a great extent depends on the cooperation of children's families and the level of engagement of the parents in their children's upbringing. The aim of the activities targeting parents whose children attend pre-primary education is to motivate parents to take active part in education of their children. **Building parental competences via common education of parents and their children in pre-school clubs has proven very useful and constructive; hence, we propose that the co-education of children and their parents becomes an integral part of the work of pre-school clubs in every community centre.**

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<sup>2</sup> The proposal is in line with the Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Integration of Roma up to 2020, Priority Area D.2.1 Education, Partial Goal 1: Increase the participation of children from MRCs in pre-primary education from approximately 18 % (in 2010) to 50 % by 2020, subject to broadening the capacity of the network of kindergartens and programs for education and upbringing of children of a preschool age in regions where the number of Roma steadily increases, including the implementation of programs targeting the improvement of cooperation with the parents, and the increase in the number of teacher's assistants in pre-primary education.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.





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**E**very single morning at seven o'clock, Eva Turtáková waits at a bus stop in Rankovce to get to school in Košice in enough time. Since the bus is usually full of people, the seventeen-year-old high school student usually spends the hour's journey standing. Three times a week she returns home at half past five and twice a week at half past two in the afternoon. She commutes to school together with her friend Monika Hadová; they are both in the first grade of the Private Pedagogical and Social Academy in Košice. Eva studies Social Work and Monika has chosen to study Preschool Pedagogy. Both programs take four years to complete and are finished with a high school leaving examination. "I study to gain the knowledge necessary for my future profession. I want to perform my job the best it can possibly be done," she says.

Eva aspires to become a social worker. She would like to help those who are in a worse situation than she is. She understands what it means to keep tightening one's belt until it is nearly unbearable. In the settlement in Rankovce, where she lives, there is a permanent lack of almost everything needed to lead a normal life. After finishing school, Eva would like to find a job as a social worker at home, in Rankovce, or in one of the nearby schools in Kecerovce or Herľany. If she maintains her current school performance, her dream will become a reality. In the first half-term, she earned honors and was awarded the highest social scholarship attainable. She is determined to achieve straight A's in the second half-term. Her friend Monika is no less successful than Eva is at school.

"My most favorite subjects are Psychology and Special Needs Pedagogy, but all subjects are interesting; I enjoy everything about the school," she is happy to admit. When Eva began showing interest in studies, her parents did not stand in her way. They were happy about her plans but, at the same time, worried that they would not be able to cover all of the related expenses. When Evka passed her entrance exams, they were not surprised at all because their daughter had always been a good student. In addition, Evka has been active in working with children in the local Church and she frequently participates in the ETP Community Centre activities.

However, the daily travel fees to Košice and back were too high to have been covered by the family budget, considering both of Evka's parents were unemployed. ETP Slovakia, therefore, decided to publish a call on the *Ludia ľudom* ("From the People, To the People") donation portal. It caught the attention of a kind donor, pensioner Eva Brestenská, who had devoted years to working in the pedagogy research and later established and managed a school for children with special needs. For her contribution to the well-being of youth, she received the national award called *Ludovít Štúr* Order. "I wish Evka a lot of success at school and many positive changes in her life," Eva Brestenská wrote to ETP, happy to see Evka's half-term results.

Evka's mother, Eva Turtáková Sr. explains that: "I married too soon and left high school afterwards. They were laughing at me in the settlement when I wanted to continue going to school while married... I wish for my unfulfilled dreams to come true for my daughters."

With her husband Bartolomej she has three daughters. Martina, who is twenty eight years old, studied to become a tailor, got married, moved to Kecerovce and became a mother of two children. Twenty-seven-year-old Ivana studied to become a shop assistant, got married and has three children. She has lived with her parents but soon her family is going to move into their own house which they have been building themselves, using the ETP Savings and Microloans Program. After half a year of maternity leave, Ivana hurried back to work as a Healthcare Assistant, and has now applied to extend her qualification in a study program that concludes with a high school leaving examination.

"We used to participate in the Savings Program too; we have fixed our roof and dug a well," Eva's mother explains. Their house is one of the nicest in the settlement and one of the few with running water; the rest of the settlers have to carry water hundreds of meters to their homes. "We moved into this house when Evka was born. We had built it ourselves and we enjoy living here. The house has four rooms. After Ivana's family leaves, Evka's study conditions will improve," the mother continues.

The family managed to build the house while their father was still employed. He is a building fitter, who used to work in his field and later found employment as a driver. Currently, he only performs the so-called activation works within the Municipality. He is also the head of the local Seventh-day Adventist Church. He is valued by the local community, which holds him up as an example. Last winter, he travelled as a volunteer with his Church group to Bolivia to build a church there.

"Evka has good and caring parents who support her in her study path. She is sensible, diligent and has everything it takes to study at a university," says her mentor, Monika Beňová.

“**W**hat a young person does not learn from their family, they can still be taught by a mentor,” says Ladislav Duda, who has been working with the youth in Sabinov as an ETP Mentor and a Divé maky (Wild Poppies) Tutor for several years.

He has been the Mentor of two ninth-graders, Filip and Lukáš, with whom he has been working for four years. The students' performance has improved, they have not cut classes, have never been retained, and they are aiming for secondary school.

“The ETP Project within which I worked with the boys finished in February, but I couldn't have left the boys before the end of the ninth grade... Of course I have decided to continue working with them... And not only with them; usually, a group of ten to twelve boys attends our meetings. They are all my son's friends,” he explains.

According to the Project, Laco was supposed to spend eight hours a week with the boys, which meant four two-hour meetings. “There's no way this could have been sufficient. The boys kept visiting me constantly; sometimes they needed help with history or maths, but often they just wanted to have a chat, play football or some board game, or they came to use a computer. Every activity can have an educational effect. The meetings take place at my home. We all have had an informal relationship; a friendly attitude is better than enforced authority,” Laco describes his experience.

Whenever one of the boys was threatened with retention, Ladislav would get in touch with the teacher's assistant and visit the boy's family. When the family was understanding, the work was usually, but not always, easier. “I will help him study until he has grasped the subject,” Laco told the School Principal. He asked her to inform him about all the boys' problems early enough for his immediate intervention.

Laco Duda is a Field Social Worker in Sabinov. His duties involve not only working with the Roma but also taking care of the elderly and everyone else who needs social help. Now aged thirty three, he has already been performing social work for twelve years. His first job was a Counsellor's Assistant at the Labor Office, later he worked as a Field Social Work Assistant, and after attaining the qualification needed, he became a Field Social Worker.

When he received his Master's degree, his name was entered in the town's Chronicle; he became the first Roma to have graduated at a university in two hundred years' history of Roma presence in the town. Laco comes from one of the first five families of settlers who came from Chminianska Nová Ves and Veľký Šariš. At present, the town of Sabinov has twelve thousand inhabitants, out of which one-thousand nine-hundred and twenty are Roma.

Laco is very concerned about the well-being of the local Roma community: “If we don't help ourselves, who else will? Will people from Bratislava, who have never met us, yet write their Dissertations on Roma issues?” he contemplates.

He is convinced that the best thing in working with the youth is setting a good example; an educated person inspires towards education; a decent person inspires towards decency; a sportsman towards becoming active in sports. Laco has managed to be an inspiration in all of these ways.

When he first became a Mentor, he began with building his work on sports. He noticed that Oskar, who came from a less stimulating environment, had an aptitude for sports, so it was through the medium of sports that he started teaching him about persistence, hard work and responsibility.

“You don't practice to please me; you do it for your own sake: to be better, more successful, respected, and to have new opportunities opened up for you.” Laco kept repeating to Oskar, to get it under his skin, that working on himself would be a move forward that would open up new opportunities. Today, Oskar is a grown man, who has succeeded in finding employment in Switzerland and is now able to provide for his family.

Laco used to be an active football player from the age of twenty, having played for the Sabinov team, with which he made it to the third league. “I had an excellent coach; a former Slávia Prague player,” he says proudly. “I didn't want to be a black sheep of the team, so I was working really hard on myself. When I quit doing sports, I started studying,” he continues.

He had originally studied to become a car mechanic and after graduation continued studying in the field of transport. He has also undergone a half-year training focused on working with people, and finally received his university diploma at St. Elizabeth University. He studied social work with a focus on the Roma minority. In his Bachelor's Thesis he discussed the specifics of field social work in the town of Sabinov. His Master's Thesis was devoted to the same issue with a focus on the entire Sabinov District.

“Neither of my siblings or their children has received an education. I was the fortunate one; as a football player I was integrated within the majority. To show a young person the way towards integration is what matters most; and this is what I focus on when working with the youth. I apply the same principles in the role of a Mentor as in the role of a parent.

Laco Duda is a father of four children. His eldest son Kristián is in the ninth grade of primary school, and soon he is going to apply for study at a school of music. Kristián has had his own music band for a while; he plays the piano and, in addition, plans to take up cimbalom classes at school. Twelve-year-old Amanda is a good student, sings well and dreams of a career as a TV presenter. Ten-year-old Ingrid is also doing well at school and would like to become a beauty stylist. The youngest daughter Lianka is only two and a half years old. Laco's wife Ingrid graduated at the Social and Pedagogical Academy, currently works in the Community Centre, and is also a former ETP Mentor.

“My work is very rewarding and I like it a lot. Since our town has had a decent Mayor, I have been able to do my job even better.”



## RECAPITULATION OF STORIES

Each day Eva and Monika commute thirty kilometers to secondary school. Since they were not able to cover their travel costs, the Community Centre published a call at a crowdfunding portal to raise funds for their cause. The girls enjoy studying and they are among the high achievers. They both have a Mentor, who among other things leads them towards reading fine literature and teaches them to play a musical instrument.

Laco is a Field Social Worker and first university student from the local community in his town. As a Mentor, he is convinced that mentors are important in teaching young people all they miss in their home upbringing. He has a friendly relationship with his protégés, giving them much more of his time than his contract binds him to. The boys he works with have become good students.



**REGULAR AND LONG-TERM MENTORING OF STUDENTS AND YOUTH FROM MARGINALIZED ROMA COMMUNITIES (MRCs)<sup>4</sup>**

The target groups of the Mentoring Program, which has been implemented by ETP Slovakia since 2009, are especially students from MRCs attending the fifth to ninth grade at elementary schools. In addition to students, mentoring support has been also provided to adult protégés. By helping to develop one's talents, skills and abilities; mentors encourage their protégés to succeed in schools, assist them with overcoming linguistic, social, economic and cultural barriers to inclusion, and motivate them to find and retain employment. The main goal of the Mentoring Program is to provide students and young adults from MRCs with an opportunity to interact with positive adult role models from majority population who introduce them to the middle class society.

The positive influence and motivating effect of the Mentoring Program on the education achievements of students and young adults from MRCs was recognized in the Final Evaluation Report of the Project Community on Its Way to Prosperity. According to the findings of the Report, at the end of June 2015, 48 out of 61 protégés, i.e. 78%, who were involved in the Mentoring Program between 2012 and 2015 and who reached the age of compulsory school education have continued studying at secondary school or have completed their secondary school studies. **Hence, we recommend that individual mentoring becomes a mandatory activity provided in each community center.**

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<sup>4</sup> The proposal is in line with the Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Integration of Roma up to 2020, Priority Area D.2.1 Education, Partial Goal 3: Increase the proportion of Roma students who reach ISCED 3B and ISCED 3C and ISCED 3A to the level of general population of the Slovak Republic, which means devoting targeted attention to children from MRCs at the time of their transfer from elementary to secondary schools and support the improvement of grades at high schools, set up adequate financial support. Eliminate barriers in the transition to high schools by increasing the permeability of the schooling system. Linking secondary education with the needs of the labor market (labor market prognosis, links to employers) and supporting the extension of targeted career consultancy services to children endangered with the transmission of generation poverty (e.g. long-term unemployed).



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“**G**ood morning, Miss Assistant,” is what Jozefína Janová hears every single morning when she leaves her house and meets the pupils and preschoolers.

Since the beginning of this school year, Jožka has been working as an Assistant in the ETP Community Centre in Veľká Ida. The children like and respect her. “I cannot describe with words how much I like working with the children. I wish I could do it all my life,” she says. When asked about whether she would like to become a teacher, a dreamy expression appears on her face: “I can’t even imagine that.” Of course she would like to teach.

The way towards reaching that dream will be complicated though; Jožka has not completed the ninth grade of the primary school. She finished the primary level after the eighth grade, and therefore could only apply for a two-year secondary school. She enrolled at the school in Veľká Ida to become a tailor. She had received good grades at primary school, but it had been very hard at the beginning; she had already lost a year after the first grade. “I was held back because I could not speak a word of Slovak and I did not understand the teacher,” she explains.

Jožka’s view of the surrounding world has been blocked by a high concrete fence. The Municipality built it to fence in the poor Roma houses and shacks, in which more than eight hundred people live; allegedly to prevent the children from running across the road. There is just one well available for all the inhabitants. Some families live close to the well but the rest have to carry the water a long way. The shacks are small and modest, some pitiful, crammed and with bad hygiene. The Janov’s house is clean and cozy. It has one room and a kitchen. Jožka’s mom is quick to offer us some coffee. “There are only five of us left living here; me, my husband and our three children,” she says.

Jožka was born into a family with ten children. She lost her brother immediately after he was born. Her sister died of pneumonia at the age of nineteen. Five of her siblings have already become independent and now have their own families. All of them have remained in the settlement, close to each other. The only children that have stayed at home are twenty-year-old Jožka and her physically and mentally disabled siblings – sixteen-year-old sister Patrícia and twenty-eight-year-old brother Martin. Their parents are also their official care givers. “I have managed to teach Martin how to sign his name and I am now working on it with Patrícia,” Jožka says. Martin and Patrícia never went to school.

While both Jožka’s parents had their jobs, they were able to make ends meet but since the day they lost their jobs, they have barely been surviving. Not one of their children, or their partners, currently has a job; they only perform the so called activation works for the Municipality. Jožka is the only one in the family who is working.

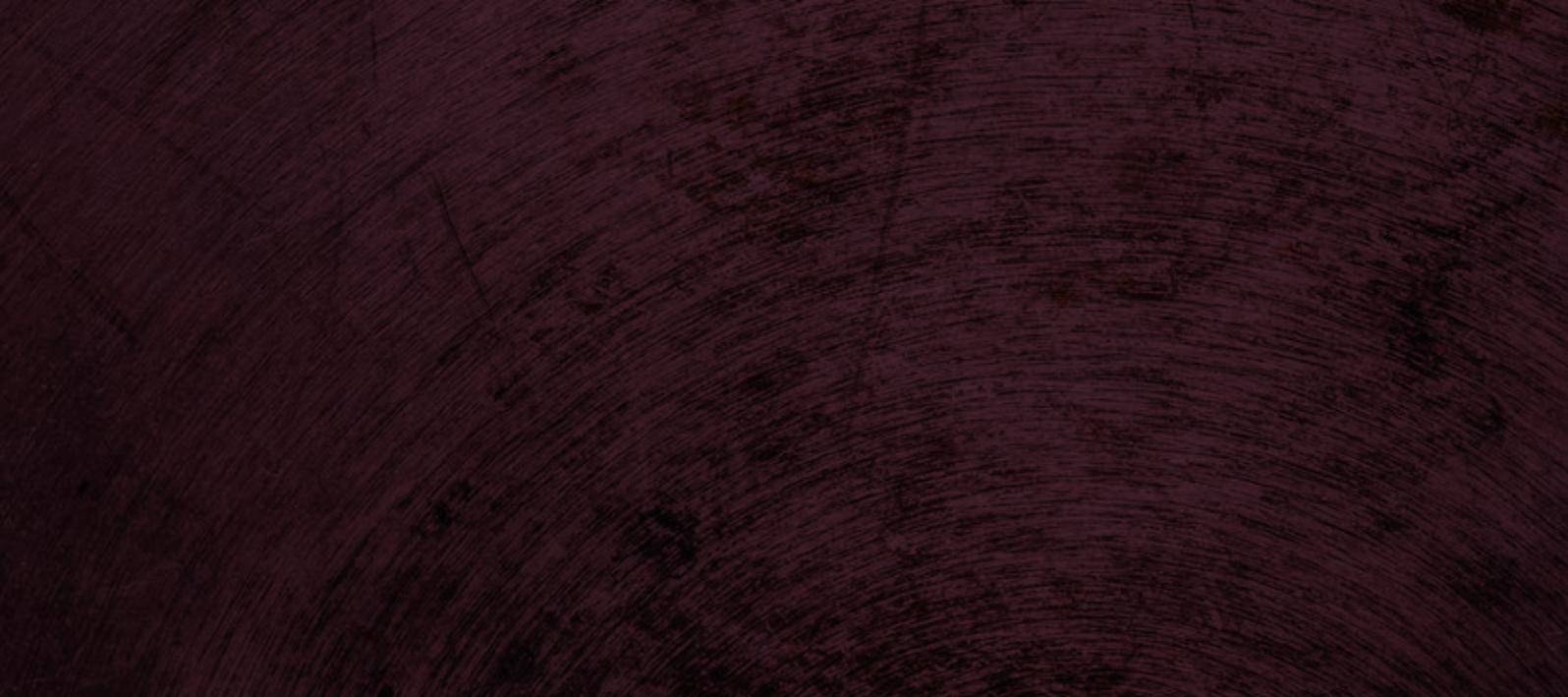
“I am the richest family member,” she says, happy about her modest income. “Since I received my first salary, I have started saving to be able to buy everyone a Christmas present. I am trying to help them, so I keep putting some of the money I earn aside,” she continues. She does not want to think about what is going to happen when the Project she is employed in ends...

Since Jožka became the Assistant in the Community Centre, her position in the settlement has changed. “Half of the people respect me and think I deserve it, the other half are envious...”

The attitude of the latter makes Jožka sad. She would like to help everyone to live better and to always have food and basic necessities. At the same time, she knows that some of the people had already had a chance to work but chose drinking and glue-sniffing instead, leaving their children to suffer. Jožka would like to save the children living in the settlement from the life they see at home, and therefore, she is so passionate and devoted to helping them. She is patient and loving, but also strict when needed. She helps them with the Slovak language, assists them in the after-school club and studies and plays with them in the Community Centre. She is determined to overcome the obstacles that are preventing her from attaining further education and graduating. She wants to work with children very much.

She also hopes for decent housing. She does not want to go on dragging the heavy water buckets forever. “Once I have my own flat, I will take my mother, father and disabled siblings with me. I wouldn’t be able to live happily, knowing that they suffer,” Jožka talks about her plans.

When she saves enough money, she plans to start her own family. “I want to be as good a mother to my future children as our mother is to us,” Jožka says. Their mother cannot read or write, but Jožka holds her in high esteem, always treating her with love and gratitude.



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**A** lot of families have left Spišské Podhradie to live abroad, mostly in England, in search of work, which is scarce at home. Those families also include ETP clients. Some of them have managed to find employment and have already been living abroad for several years. Others have earned some money and returned home. The rest were less fortunate; they found no work and returned with no money earned. “After four months in Sheffield, we are behind in our utility bills payments. We have had to struggle to cover them,” says Iveta Čonková.

They spent four months in England, living with their daughter Simona, who had settled there a while ago and currently works in horticulture. Another two of Iveta’s grown children have found work in Sheffield as well. Yet Iveta, her husband and their two sons found no jobs in England and returned home to face unemployment again. They had never enjoyed studying, had received no education, and therefore, have had a hard time searching for work.

The youngest son Erik is now four months behind at school and has to work hard to catch up with the rest of the class. He is in the ninth grade and would like to finish it successfully. He is heading for high school, determined to become a car mechanic. He is the only one in the family who enjoys studying; he has been among the most clever and multi-skilled students visiting the ETP Community Centre.

“The situation in Sheffield is getting harder and harder in terms of work,” Iveta explains. She had hoped that they would be able to use the money earned in England to buy a house, repair it and add an attic to it. “May I ask if you are going to continue with the Microloans Program?,” she asks. What kind of answer could she possibly get, considering the ETP Community Centre ceased its operation in the town with the end of the Project?

Iveta’s family had applied for the participation in the Microloans Program before, but were not successful; they had not been able to get through the first stage, i.e. the Savings Program, although the adult family members had passed the Financial Education Course. “After a couple of months we were forced to give up; we had no money left to put aside...” she explains. It seems that the vision of a new house with an attic can only become reality if at least one family member manages to find decent work. However, they have no idea where to search...

The Plachetko family was more fortunate. They spent two years in Sheffield, during which both Branislav and his wife Janka were employed. They both managed to find a job in the local Carrefour; the wife was working in the cold kitchen and the husband at the grocery department. Their daughters, seventeen-year-old Janka and fourteen-year-old Mária, attended a local school and they both learned to speak English quite well.

“We were unable to find employment at home. My husband worked in the Czech Republic for a while, but returned home after the employer ceased to pay the wages to his employees,” says Janka. Currently, both Branislav and Janka are jobless and in desperate need for money; both of their daughters are aiming towards high school. The younger daughter, inspired by helping her mother in the kitchen, would like to become a confectioner, and the older daughter is going to high school in Levoča and plans to continue studying after graduation. “I am going to study at a university; I want to become a police officer,” she says without hesitation.

Janka Plachetková is an energetic woman; she was not afraid to drive a car in the big city in England. Driving her father to see a doctor in the town of Poprad in Slovakia is a child’s game to her. Before leaving for England, Janka had been active in the local drama group, together with her older daughter.

“The driving force in our family is my mother-in-law Helena Plachetková. She used to run a traditional Roma dance club in the ETP Community Centre, which we attended. She also worked with the Čercheň (“Star”) drama club and still devotes her time to working with people. She has been living in her own house among the non-Roma for a long time, and she has also helped us buy an older house nearby,” says Janka.

Their house needed reconstruction, which was made possible thanks to the ETP Savings and Microloans Program. “We have installed new flooring and doors, renovated the facade and the bathroom, and built the attic. We get along very well with our non-Roma neighbors; our older daughter babysits their children,” says Janka proudly. “We will always speak well of ETP,” she adds. The entire family used to attend the education activities of the Community Centre and the children came to play and use the computer until they got one of their own. ETP Slovakia ran the Community Centre in Spišské Podhradie from 2002.

## RECAPITULATION OF STORIES

Nineteen-year-old Jožka, a trained tailor, who is one of ten children in her poor family, had not succeeded in finding employment. At first, she worked in our Community Centre as a Volunteer and later moved to a full-time position of a Local Assistant. She loves the job and would like to do it for the rest of her life, which motivates her to complete her education. With the exception of Jožka, all the members of her family are unemployed.

Roma families living in localities with very little work opportunities often leave their homes to seek work abroad. They would prefer to work at home if they had a chance. Some of them succeed in a foreign country, others are less fortunate. Our stories indicate that those who were more active in the Community Centres were also more likely to succeed abroad.



**PROVISION OF EMPLOYMENT INTEGRATION MEDIATION SERVICES TO LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYED JOBSEEKERS<sup>5</sup>**

Employment integration of clients from MRCs is capable to generate successful outcomes under the condition that a long-term systematic approach involving several interrelated interventions is adopted. Systemic solutions require the adoption of targeted measures that create conditions enabling clients to find, as well as to retain employment.

Within the framework of the Project Community on Its Way to Prosperity, ETP has introduced and verified **employment integration services** in which the role of an Employment Counselor is to assist a client with appropriate skills development and job search plan. In addition, the Employment Counselor cooperates with local employers and networks with personnel agencies, employers and labor offices. The individualized work of the Counselor continues, once the client commences employment, by assisting them and their families in the process of integration at the workplace. Together they work towards maximizing the clients' chances to retain the new employment.

**We recommend that employment integration services are to be provided in municipalities with a significant number of long-term unemployed jobseekers. To facilitate retention of employment, it is recommended for employers creating work opportunities suitable for persons with a very little or no work experience and low level of qualification to also provide employment integration services to their new employees who come from the unstable environment of socially excluded settlements.**

In addition, it is desirable that the **Employment Integration Services also involve the creation of a *repayable support financial fund for the jobseekers*** who, sometimes repeatedly, need to commute to towns to attend interviews and appointments at personnel agencies but have no initial capital prior to commencement of employment. The support fund might involve a repayable microloan to help clients to get through the period between their start and the first payday at the new job.

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<sup>5</sup> The present proposal is in line with the Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Integration of Roma up to 2020, Priority Area D.2.2 Employment, Partial Goal 1: Support the increase of employability of Roma community members (Art. 1).

“**T**he librarians used to call me a ‘library kid’ as I used to spend a lot of time in the library. I read a lot and with pleasure. I used to borrow fairy tales, adventures, later also serious novels and non-fiction,” Miroslav Jano from Košice-Šaca remembers the years of his childhood and youth.

Library kids are usually good students. However, this never applied to Miro; he was a careless student. As with the majority of his Roma friends, he was retained a couple of times and finished the compulsory school attendance after the seventh grade.

“If I had known what I know today, everything would be different. I would have graduated and applied for university...,” he contemplates. “There is nothing I can do about it now; I am forty-five years old and I never made it to the eighth grade of primary school... How could I possibly apply for secondary school? Which primary school would let me finish the eighth and the ninth grade?” Miro asks himself but finds no answers.

Truth be told, he has never addressed these questions to any school or institution; he keeps struggling with them on his own. So far he has not found enough courage to move forward in resolving the question of his unfinished education. “Perhaps I will discuss it with the Principal of the local primary school,” he encourages himself.

A grown man, Miro feels ashamed of the irresponsibility of his youth. Still, it has always been normal for the Roma children from Šaca to leave school before the ninth grade... The cases of Roma students who have succeeded in completing the primary school have been exceptional. Reaching adulthood, most of the people find themselves trapped in the situation with no escape route. “Maybe I will be the first one to find the way and show it to others too,” Miro dreams. It is high time he has made a move and started working towards fulfilling that dream.

Miroslav Jano has never been asked to do manual labor while performing the so-called activation works; there have always been other, better, jobs assigned to him than sweeping the sidewalks. The books he has read have earned him a job at the local library, where he helped for several years, as well as a job at the ETP Community Centre, where he assisted. Miro is currently employed at the local primary school, where he assists in the after-school club. The job involves working with Roma children, but also visiting their families, who predominantly live in the infamous neglected blocks of flats at Námestie oceliarov (Steelworkers’ Square).

“Many times I have to teach them how to hold a pencil in their hands. I also teach them about hygiene and good behavior. Very few of the first-graders are able to speak Slovak. The Roma children usually don’t manage to get in the kindergarten. They only pick up a few Slovak words during the pre-school preparation at the Community Centre. I wish so much that they would get to like school and enjoy studying. Life is so hard without an education...”

Miro has not started his own family yet. He lives with his mother in a housing estate in a decent flat which they bought several years ago. His mother is in her seventies. She used to work as a cleaner in a hospital for years while Miro’s father worked in the local steel factory. The family led an honest life, but the parents were not able to keep an eye on their six children to make sure they prepared for school. Since the father died, Miro has been taking care of their mother, his siblings being grateful to him for taking over their responsibilities. Miro’s brothers have lived in England and his sisters have stayed in Šaca. One of them works in a hospital as a sanitarian and the other at U.S. Steel as a cleaner. One of the sisters is a widow and the other one has a husband who is unemployed. Miro and his mother support both of them. In addition, Miro has taken up a job at a cleaning service to earn some extra money. “Once a month, we go shopping. We not only fill our own fridge but also bring food to my siblings and their families,” Miro says.

Three years ago, when Šacakero dživipen (Šaca’s Life) Civic Association was being formed, Miroslav Jano did not hesitate and took the chance to get involved. “We have currently been preparing the fourth year of Miss Romani čhaj. The first three years were successful, proving that Roma girls are really beautiful. They were assessed by a jury made of important people, such as the Mayor, a singer from Košice and a journalist. Already the first year of Miss Roma has managed to fill the local Cultural Centre with a lot of spectators. People found it hard to believe that the event was the work of Šacakero dživipen, helped by a social worker Katarína Semaníková.”

Šacakero dživipen has nine members. They help by cleaning the municipal areas, painting the fences, tidying up the local manor house, and offering their services to the general public. “We don’t want anything in exchange; we do it for the sake of being useful and for a good feeling,” Miro speaks on behalf of the group.

They appreciate the support of the local Mayor and consider it very promising. “I was growing up among the Roma in Šaca; I like these people and I know that they will not resolve their situation themselves. Therefore, I am looking for the way to improve their lives, at the same time improving the lives of all Šaca’s inhabitants,” said Daniel Petřík, the Mayor of Košice-Šaca Municipality, at an ETP event.

Šacakero dživipen plans to establish a theater group, and Miro definitely wants to be a part of it. “It is going to involve children, youth and adult actors alike. We want our plays to depict poverty with which everyone here is so familiar,” Miro reveals the intentions of the ensemble that has been taking shape.



Ladislav Oláh from Šimonovce studied to become a machinist. His family was doing well while he had a job, but after he lost it, it all started to fall apart.

He has been looking for a job for over ten years, without success. Occasionally he is able to get a part-time job, but that is all there is. He has also tried searching in other regions of Slovakia as well as in the Czech Republic, but with no success. A couple of times he had been promised a job over the phone, but when the employer met him in person, the vacancy was no longer available. “That’s because I am a Gypsy,” Ladislav thinks.

On the outside, the family looks as if it had it all; their house is nicely decorated, a bathroom is a given, each family member uses a computer, and they all dress very well. There is no significant difference in the living standard between the Roma and the non-Roma in Šimonovce and there are hardly any conflicts between the two groups. However, it is a region with a lack of employment opportunities and the Roma have the hardest task to get a job. Ladislav claims that it is thanks to his wife’s wise management that their family is doing so well. “My wife Timea does not need to be taught how to manage our finances, it is me who is learning from her,” he praises his wife.

Ladislav was twenty three years old when they met. He was working in a tobacco factory and Timea had just become a tailor. To be with her, Ladislav had to travel to Radnovce, but after two months, he realized that it was rather expensive. He was not going to give it up though; he suggested that they got married as soon as possible so that Timea could move in to live with him in his parent’s house in Šimonovce. She said yes, and a modest wedding followed. “We have been happily married for twenty one years and we have two grown children. We still live in the same house together with my brother’s family. Our parents used to live with us too until my brother and I built them a small house,” he explains.

As the children were growing up, Ladislav and Timea started considering building a new home. Five years ago, they bought a plot of land across the street. They planned to build the house themselves; the father, the son, the brother, and other men from their family and surrounding.

“I am also able to do expert construction jobs, including wiring, although I do not have any certificates for that,” says Ladislav proudly. However, to start the construction, they were missing the most important thing – the money to buy the materials. Timea was saving little by little, but it was not enough. The situation changed when ETP provided an opportunity to enter a savings program, in which the clients were able to receive a hundred per cent matchfunding after pre-determined regular saving. The Savings Program was a hot topic in the village; people were considering it, but had doubts at the same time. They could not believe that they would only gain, not lose. The Oláh family decided to take the chance and start saving. “How could I possibly lose, if I deposit money on the passbook account under my own name?,” Ladislav argues logically. After a year of saving, Ladislav was able to make the first purchase of the construction material needed to build the new house. To him this was a proof that entering the Program had been a right decision.

“I shop smart; I don’t buy what I find in the first shop. I browse through the catalogues on the Internet and search for the best offers,” says Ladislav, giving a further example: “For instance, the PROFIX insulation blocks that I need are commonly sold at three Euros each. I had searched until I found a store in which they were sold for two-fifty. That makes quite a big difference when you need to buy eighty of those blocks. Also, when I needed bent sheet metal, I bought cheaper straight sheets and bent them myself. In addition, I was given discount for making a large purchase. I also saved some money by shopping in nearby Hungary.”

At the end of May last year, the Oláh family commenced construction. They worked throughout the summer and continued into the fall as long as the weather was good. Before the winter started, they had the entire walls erected and the roof and windows installed. All through the winter, they were doing the interior works and continued with the exterior as soon as the weather got warmer again.

“The most difficult part was to make a start; to get the money together. Everything that’s followed has been running smoothly,” he says. To buy further construction materials, the family was provided with a microloan by ETP. They have used the money wisely and managed to repay the microloan, after which they were provided another microloan by ETP to do the finishing work. “We don’t want to borrow any more money. We’d rather wait until the debt has been repaid and start saving ourselves,” they have decided.

The house is growing with each day. It was designed by Ing. arch. Katarína Smatanová, the author of the projects of family homes in Rankovce. The Oláh family has made clever use of the variability of the design. The house is eighty square meters. On the ground floor there is a kitchen, a living room and a bathroom. On the first floor, there are two rooms with a large common loggia. Under the balcony, there is a covered open space. Later, when the family has saved more money, they plan to add another room on the ground floor. “We are going to stay in the house where we live now and the children are going to move to the new one,” the parents say.

Their son Ladislav studied to become a hairdresser. It was not only him who became enthusiastic about the craft; his five-year-old sister Timea started showing interest too. Their caring father began to envision their future in his mind: “They will open a beauty salon together; they will support each other and become well-known and successful.”

However, the optimistic vision has not been fulfilled; Ladislav Jr. is not able to find a position to suit his qualification. “We are hardly making ends meet; hiring staff is out of question. Our son’s qualification is hardly of any use in this region. The local people are happy when they can just provide their daily bread; they don’t think about going to the hairdresser’s. The entire Gemer Region is a place of vast poverty – this is what we were listening to repeatedly when we were looking for a job for our son,” explains the father of the family. Once again, it has been proved: “Where there is little for all, there is nothing left for the Gypsies.”

Their daughter Timea no longer dreams of the future of a hairdresser. She gave up the idea and learned to cope with the reality of becoming a cook. After all, eating is something we all need to do. Ladislav Jr. would like to study further to be able to graduate. He believes that with a secondary school leaving examination, he will be able to find a job. “I should have cared more about our children’s education. I regret not having studied myself; everything would be easier now,” contemplates Ladislav Oláh.









“It was hard for the class teacher to let me go,” Iveta Kandráčová from Rudňany recalls of the “sin of her youth.” She had studied at a secondary school to become a chemist; she had been a good student who had enjoyed school, but... she left it.

“I met my future husband and became pregnant,” she explains. The years went by and her four children were keeping her busy. There was no room for school in her thoughts.

Years later, Iveta’s story repeated itself, but this time with her daughter Andrea, who became pregnant in secondary school. Yet, she acted more wisely than her mother had. She was encouraged by the people working at the Community Centre to continue in her studies despite her pregnancy. Andrea took their advice and passed her final exams, already as a mother. She received a Certificate of Apprenticeship as a Practical Woman, which opened up the opportunity to work in the Community Centre as part of the so-called graduate practice. Andrea is currently on maternity leave with a third child. For other women in the community, she has become a living proof that “where there is a will, there is a way.”

Her mother, Iveta, was proud of her daughter and, even more so, she became inspired by her.

Together with five other women from the settlement in Rudňany, they decided to return to school. Iveta was forty at that time. “I received my Certificate of Apprenticeship at the age of forty four,” she says with pride.

It was not easy for them to resume studying, but not a single woman of the six would give it up. They did not want to be humiliated in front of their children and grandchildren. They kept encouraging each other before the tests and exams, going through them all together. For two years, they had to walk two kilometers to the village, where the Secondary Vocational School in Bijacovce was based. The youngest of the women was twenty five, the eldest was sixty. Paradoxically, it was the eldest woman who became the driving force for the rest of the group. Passing the final exams, they all finished their studies successfully and became tailors. “I would love to sew if I had a sewing machine,” she says.

With six grandchildren, however, she is fully occupied. She helps her daughters raise their children, studying with them and cooking for them every single day. Together with her husband they live in a block of flats in the settlement, where they have a living room, a kitchen, running water and a toilet. They used to live in a brick shack, but the Municipality had to have it demolished due to the landslides in the area. Temporarily, they were provided with military tents, and later, they were allocated a rental flat.

Iveta’s husband is a miner. He used to work and earn good money in the local mine until it was closed down. Since then, he has not found another job and now only performs the municipal utility services along with many other men from the settlement he used to work with.

Iveta has been employed as a cleaner in the local kindergarten for eleven years. She also used to lead a Dance Club at the ETP Community Centre. Iveta’s son-in-law also works in the kindergarten as a stoker.

Iveta acts like a contented woman until the topic of our discussion switches to her kids. Out of four children, only two are still alive. She lost the first one more than twenty years ago.

“It happened at a pedestrian crossing in Spišská Nová Ves. I carried little Leonard in my arms and five-year-old Janka walked beside me. All of a sudden, a car stormed in and my daughter was dead immediately. I still cannot bear to face the site of the accident. What is more, three years ago I buried my twenty-five-year-old son Vladimír, who had died of leukemia and left three small children behind.”

These were the last words Iveta was able to say before she broke down in tears. Her children’s tragedies are still painful.

## RECAPITULATION OF STORIES

Miro is a broad-minded and knowledgeable man but to succeed in life he also needs to attain formal education. His situation becomes complicated by the fact that he has not finished primary school. At the age of forty, he would like to undo the folly of his youth, providing he gathers enough courage and finds a school that will enable him to complete his education.

Ladislav, a diligent builder, who has used an ETP microloan to build his own house, is upset about being unable to find work over the last ten years, despite having a Certificate of Apprenticeship. What is more, his son, who has only finished school recently, has been unable to find a job that would match his qualification too; there is no need for hairdressers in his area.

Iveta was over forty when she received her Certificate of Apprenticeship as a Practical Woman. When she was young, she left school, became pregnant and got married. She is able to cook, sew and perform all practical women's duties, yet she abased herself by taking up a cleaner's job at the local kindergarten, satisfied with just having a job in the first place.



**CONNECT SECONDARY EDUCATION WITH PRACTICAL TRAINING AT WORKPLACES (DUAL EDUCATION)<sup>6</sup>**

All important strategic documents of the Slovak Republic regarding the employment policies call for secondary education to be aligned with the requirements of the labor market. Years of our experience confirm that local branches of secondary vocational schools accessible to students from marginalized Roma communities (MRCs) offer study programs that do not always take into account the demands of the labor market. The offered study programs most often include tailoring, bricklaying, hairdressing or car mechanics, while the number of vacancies for graduates of given programs in the areas with a large MRC population is usually very limited.

Secondary education providers need to work in close cooperation with potential employers to identify their requirements for the labor force, so that the students in the process of practical preparation acquire skills and knowledge of procedures required by their future employers. Experience has also shown that the practical skills acquired by the graduates of certain study programs; especially in the field of tailoring, are not always sufficient to meet the standards of the labor market. Hence, **we recommend that due attention is to be paid to the alignment of school curricula with the requirements of the labor market. Furthermore, secondary school practical subjects need to reflect current standards and trends, and are to be taught at potential future employers' workplaces.**

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<sup>6</sup> The proposal is in line with the Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Integration of Roma up to 2020, Priority Area D.2.2 Employment, Partial Goal 1: Support the increase of employability of Roma community members.

**Z**uzana is not her real name. It was made up because the main character in the story wants to remain anonymous. There are parts of her life she is not proud of at all and she does not want her children to be ashamed of her again.

“They’ve already had enough trouble with me,” she says. Zuzana is in her forties, she is non-Roma and she lives in a nice flat in a town. Her bookcase is full of fine literature. Zuzana has read all the books it contains. “I had even more books, but the children had to burn them all when we ran out of fuel,” she confesses. Today, there is a wood stove in their flat to keep them warm. “I don’t go to the library anymore. I have read all the books available there.” Despite being so enlightened and knowledgeable, one could say that she must have been born under a bad star, considering her past.

Zuzana only saw her father once in her life. Her mother was married twice; her second husband was an alcoholic, who kept pushing her away. She wanted to become a tailor but, due to the lack of vacancies at school, she was only admitted to a technical vocational school. Zuzana found no fulfillment there, so she left the school. She attained no other education. She did not care. She has had various occasional jobs, including in technical services, where she had to take care of the maintenance of public areas.

At the age of twenty, she found a man who would become a source of her sorrow for the next fourteen years. They never got married; they only lived as partners and, together, they had four children. The man soon turned out to be a tyrant and an alcoholic. He spent most of his time with his friends in the pub. He used to humiliate her, so she would not dare to speak her mind and risk abuse. Many times she would take the kids and run away from him.

“Ten years ago he died and left me with huge debts, including on social insurance payments, which I had no chance to pay off. The debt reduced the child allowance rate and it was secured on our flat, thus posing the risk of eviction. Stress and unhappiness caused me to drink even more,” she admits.

‘Even more’ meant daily and a lot. Before that, the drinking had been less frequent and the doses smaller. Sometimes she drank together with her partner.

“I hardly ever got alcohol with my own money. I had friends who were better off and a rich neighbor who did not want to drink alone.” Once her ‘drinking spree’ had started, it lasted a whole month without interruption. And with the neighbor, I drank too...,” Zuzana admits.

“Our family never had money. Left alone ten years ago, after losing my partner, I was desperate. My eldest daughter was fourteen, my son was thirteen, the younger daughter was eleven and the youngest daughter was seven,” she continues.

Zuzana had no job and she only received the so-called benefit in material need. To avoid the children shouting at her for being drunk, she would return home late, when they were asleep, and she would sneak into bed in silence. In such a state, would she possibly have been able to recognize what was going on with the children? Would she have been able to care whether they were healthy, fed, clean and ready for school?

The children had to take care of themselves, the older kids helping the younger ones.

The two older daughters have become tailors, the son a bricklayer and the youngest daughter is going to be a tailor too. They will not even look at alcohol; the example of their parents has been scary enough to put them off.

The emergency situation in the family was handled with the help of social workers. The benefit in material need was changed to be paid out via a special beneficiary, which meant that her due payments started to be deducted automatically, gradually paying off the lien on their house. “There were five of us and we only had 25 Euros to last us for a week. I don’t understand how we managed to make ends meet,” she says.

After clearing the debt, Zuzana entered rehab to treat her addiction. Today, she still cannot imagine how much her children must have suffered. Fortunately, they were helped by the social workers.

“My children would send me beautiful letters to Predná Hora. They were writing that they loved me and wished me to recover. I was crying while I was reading them... I never cry in front of the children... I cried recently when I found a letter my son had sent to my daughter from England. In it, he'd written how much he loved me and how proud he was of me, not drinking any more..., ” she talks with tears coming into her eyes.

After returning from rehab sober, she understood what she had done wrong and realized that she had to make it right. She knew that, among the steps to take, she needed to buy her own flat. She lacked money, but she was able to obtain it thanks to the savings and the match-funding provided by ETP. “Our flat needed reconstruction. The wind was blowing through the windows and whenever a storm was approaching, we had to secure them with nails,” Zuzana explains.

She decided to use the ETP microloan to buy new windows, safety doors, floors and tiles. The son, who works abroad, used his own money to do the improvements, adding a half-room to the flat. He is going to live there when he returns home. Zuzana rejoices at the thought of making further renovations. She enjoys spending her time at home cooking, cleaning and re-reading her books...

Her financial situation has improved substantially. She works in a bakery diligently and none of the money she earns is consumed by alcohol. She only has the youngest daughter left to take care of. The girl is very responsible. One day when her mother was sick, she took an early morning shift to cover for her so that she did not lose her job. After work, she went to school.

Since leaving rehab four years ago, Zuzana has only experienced a minor setback once. Apart from that, she is holding up, abstaining from alcohol completely. She is grateful to her children for not having given up on her and for being capable of loving her despite all she put them through. She loves them and if she could, she would take it all back and undo the harm.



## A HOME THEY NEVER EVEN DARED TO DREAM ABOUT

**D**enisa Baszcsúrová has fulfilled what would have been a childhood dream, if only she could have imagined having a house of her own. In January, after ten years of living in a shack in the ghetto, she moved into a new home in the town of Moldava nad Bodvou.

Denisa is thirty one years old and ever since she was eleven, day after day, she had to face the question of where she would be sleeping that night. Sometimes Denisa and her mother could stay in Drienovec, other times they remained in Moldava, always sleeping at some friend's house. At times they were able to stay in one place for a couple of nights, sometimes for one week, occasionally for more.

"I never had to bother packing because I had no possessions. It was the same with my mother. The only things we had were the clothes we were wearing. When I started going to school, I had to get a school bag. Wherever we slept, my mother would take me to school and back every single day," she remembers of her childhood. "She was always so good to me. I could always feel that she loved me" she adds. Denisa is certain that her mother loved all of her six children. However, the situation in their family was very difficult.

Their mother came from the village of Štós. By the time she married and moved to Moldava nad Bodvou, she already had a daughter, Renáta, who left for the Czech Republic when she was eighteen. Since then, the family has not heard from her. After Renáta, the couple had four more children; Ernest and Ervín are in their fifties now and Erika and Anastázia are in their forties. They used to live in the settlement in a house made of clay. Their father was sickly and his wife was cheating on him with another man who beat her. The mother abandoned her children and left with the man. When her husband passed away, their four kids were placed in a children's home. Denisa was born after her mother's abusive partner had died. The mother had no money, so she resorted to selling her body on the streets.

"The only thing that mother ever told me about my father was that he was white, he did not pay child support and he did not care about us. I never met him... Maybe, if he hadn't died, we wouldn't have had to search for a place to stay every single night," she contemplates.

Denisa felt relief when her mother found a new partner, a decent elderly Roma who used to live in a flat in the town. Unfortunately, their happiness did not last for long. The man died after a couple of years, so they lost the roof above their heads again. The town allocated a rental apartment to them but the mother was not able to pay the rent, so they were evicted. "She left to live with her sister in the settlement," Denisa recalls. She died an old beaten woman at the age of sixty five.

In the meantime, Denisa reached maturity and married at the age of eighteen. Igor, who was a year younger, has always loved her, despite the fact that she already had a son with another man. The young family moved in to live with Igor's parents. As the number of their kids increased, the house was becoming more and more tight.

The young Baszcsúr family decided to build a shack in the Budulovská settlement in Moldava. They knew what to expect there; a dirty place with a bad reputation plagued by alcohol abuse and glue-sniffing. Yet, they had no other choice.

In the fall, the Baszcsúr family let us into their shack, but only under one condition: no pictures taken. We understood. The shack was a small square room with a big bed and a furniture set. The worst challenge of all was how to maintain hygiene. To go to the toilet, they had to go out. To wash, they had to bring water in and use a basin. This was not appropriate for a family with four children. Sebastian is now thirteen, Denisa a year younger, Karmen is ten and six-year-old Igor is going to school in September. He is bright, lively and energetic. When asked about his favorite fairy tale, he gives me a puzzled look. "I never told him any fairy tales because I did not know any myself... My mother never told me fairy tales..." Denisa admits with embarrassment.

Irma Horváthová, the Leader of the ETP Community Centre, praises Denisa: "She is a good mother." The time she devotes to her children is worth it; they are doing well at school. The family comes to the Community Centre regularly, children and adults alike, with the aim of studying.

The Community Centre of ETP Slovakia recommended the Baszcsúr family to enter its Savings Program. Through the ten years of living in the shack, Igor and Denisa never gave up on the idea that, one day, they would get out. Neither of them has a job, they both live on social benefits. However, they decided they would start making their monthly savings. Denisa has already learned to make ends meet with the little money they have. In the ETP Savings Program, she has managed to save twelve hundred Euros in 39 months, thus becoming eligible for the match-funding.

At that time, there was a chance to buy an older family house, quickly and at a good price. However, its roof had fallen down. "If we had money, I would buy the house and the material to build the new roof. I would do it myself, with the help from my friends and relatives," Igor said. His mother was already retired; she had been working all of her life. She encouraged Igor's brave idea. She borrowed the money from the bank so that they could purchase the house a little further from the town centre, on a nice quiet street among the houses mainly inhabited by the Roma.

Since they bought the house in October, Igor has worked there daily. "I had to remove loads of debris first. After that I was able to start working on the new roof. There was nothing left from the old roof that could be used. The ceilings were in really bad shape too. The staircase we now use as a matter of course lacked stability. I have fixed it all myself. I am able to lay bricks, paint the interior, do the woodwork, as well as make the paving and the floors. As soon as it gets warmer, I will paint the house's exterior and interior walls, then I will do the floors," Igor Baszcsúr explains.

Three days after they moved in, we paid them a visit. Igor led us to the back of the house that had once served as a barn: "There is going to be another room here."

Denisa is excited about the big garden behind their house: "I am going to grow potatoes, tomatoes and flowers here." She is still getting used to the spacious living room, the large kitchen, the bathroom with running water, the bathtub, the shower and the boiler. "Each of us has our own bed and, together, we can finally enjoy our meals on a large dining table. Compared to our old shack, this is luxury. The only thing that is missing here are the people from the settlement," she admits. If only they could all have such a home.

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Viera Duždová and her husband, František, from Ostrovany had planned to have four children. Unintended, four more children were born into their marriage. All the children are healthy, except for the youngest one.

“Tomáško was born in the eight month of pregnancy. During childbirth he suffered a brain hemorrhage. When the doctors told us that the left side of his body would be affected, my husband and I decided that we would raise the boy in the same way as we had all our previous children; we would just need to give him more attention,” says Viera. The boy is over a year old now and, recently, he has learned to sit on his own. His left arm is less flexible and a bit shorter, while his face and legs seem unaffected. Being cross-eyed, the little boy will have to undergo surgery. He is lively and cheerful, screaming with the voice of a real man, however, he has not made any attempts to speak so far. Besides infantile paralysis, Tomáško suffers from digestive problems and stridor.

“Every two weeks we travel to Prešov to attend rehabilitation sessions. Each time we learn a new series of reflexive exercises, which we then repeat four times a day. These exercises are painful, and it breaks my heart to see my son cry when we do them, but they are really necessary. The doctors are saying that if we neglected the rehabilitation, the boy would be bedbound for the rest of his life. To avoid that, we rather struggle through the torment of exercising on the kitchen table over and over again... The doctor has praised us, saying that Tomáško’s condition is developing very well. Our son definitely brings us joy,” Viera continues.

At the beginning of this winter, the Dužda family moved into a new house. So far, they have occupied two rooms and a kitchen; a bathroom and a toilet are still to be finished. “The house has been extremely difficult to finish. My husband would be happy to keep on building, but we are constantly short of money. The foundations were built six years ago. Then the children came, so we needed to use our money for diapers and baby food instead. Thanks to God, we have already managed to repay the ETP microloan. To get to that point, I had to consider each cent before spending it,” Viera explains.

The money acquired from the Savings and the Microloans Program was used to obtain construction materials for the new house. The family was in desperate need of their own home. Before, they had occupied a single room of an old dark house belonging to their parents, which is close to Viera’s sister and brother. The new house is oriented towards the sunny side, being kept warm by the sun in the summer and by a solid fuel heater during winter.

“We would like to get new furniture and equipment for the new house. As soon as we have repaid the money owed to a furniture store, we are going to start saving for electricity connection. So far, we have supplied electricity from my brother. Next, we are going to work on running water, the kitchen, and the toilet. That should be enough for us to live decently,” Viera continues.

At Christmas, the family was already enjoying the comfort of their new house. When they all gathered to celebrate, the place looked like a kindergarten. The eldest daughter Judita came with her four children, some of them older than her own brother Tomáš. Judita is soon going to give birth to a fifth child. At around the same time, the family is going to welcome another member - the first child of Viera’s daughter Sandra.

Judita and Sandra studied to become shop assistants. They were both good students but the family lacked money desperately and the daily travel expenses for the girls to commute to Prešov were too high for them to cover. Therefore, both girls had to leave the school. At that time, each of them had a boyfriend, and they soon married. Similarly, Viera’s son František did not finish secondary school.

Viera herself did not obtain a Certificate of Apprenticeship either, yet for a different reason: a month before she was supposed to receive it, she had found a boyfriend, got pregnant shortly after, and married him. Both of them were eighteen at the time. Viera now knows that it was not the right choice.

“I have a good, hardworking husband, who is so upset that he cannot find a permanent job. He just helps at public utility services. He is very shy...,” Viera says. Shy indeed, he did not even show up during our visit. In contrast, Viera and Simona (both good students), five-year-old Laura, three-year-old Tobias, and Judita’s children were running around, asking to be photographed... Viera was just smiling, content.

Each morning, she gets up at half past five. She makes breakfast and snacks for the children, helps them get ready for school, tidies up and starts cooking. After cleaning up, she prepares the meals, does the laundry and the ironing... In the meantime, she exercises with her little one and, as with all other family members, struggles with carrying home heavy water buckets several times a day.





**M**ilan Gašpar has been losing sleep since last summer. He is one of the builders who have decided to be part of the self-help construction of family homes in Rankovce. After completing the Savings and Microloans Program, he commenced construction full of determination. Besides working on his own house, he depends on various part-time jobs to be able to cover the construction costs. As soon as he is finished with the work he does for others, he hurries home to work for himself.

He would like to finish the house as soon as possible, ideally by the end of the summer vacations, so that his children will have better study conditions from the very beginning of the new school year.

“My plot of land is located on a hill; it is nice and it will certainly be a good place to live. However, to even out the site I needed to obtain more of the material than I had expected; it was rather costly. When I was digging the foundation trenches, the soil was so hard that while I was struggling with the first few meters, the rest of the builders had their foundations nearly finished. But God helped me; I met a skilled excavator operator, who dug the hole quickly,” Milan describes the problems he has encountered during the construction. “I was most afraid to do the foundations; they were my nightmare. When they were finally finished and covered with the slab, I raised my hands to the sky and thanked God,” he recalls.

Milan Gašpar and his entire family are deeply religious Adventists. Ten-year-old Frederika has been an excellent student and she wants to become a nun. “I don’t know if she is really going to become a nun. She likes to dance a lot too,” Milan doubts his daughter’s plans with a smile on his face.

“All my children are smart; eight-year-old Samko does not receive the best grades at school, but he is very hardworking and obedient. He has been working really hard at the construction, doing everything he is told. The youngest son Milan is six and he is a devoted football player, who would even sleep with the ball,” Milan takes pleasure in talking about his children.

With his wife Marta, they do not want to have any more children. They have been living together since he was eighteen and she was fifteen... “She is still as beautiful as when I met her,” he loves her as much as at the beginning of their relationship. “When I brought her home, my mom was angry. She told me that I should think it through and get it all sorted out. No wonder; we were still kids back then...,” Milan recalls the events after twelve years.

He wanted to provide for his wife, and therefore exchanged school for occasional construction jobs. He was only a couple of months away from receiving a Bricklayer’s Certificate of Apprenticeship. His wife Marta studied to become a tailor, but also decided to leave the school.

The newlyweds moved in to live with Milan’s parents in their four-room flat in Ťahanovce housing estate in Košice. Besides the parents, they had to share the flat with five Milan’s siblings.

“Since they were young, my parents dreamed of living in Rankovce; it was my mother’s birthplace. As children, we used to spend vacations in Rankovce and we liked it there as well. We felt more free when we were in the countryside,” Milan explains.

Milan’s father was non-Roma. He died of a serious illness three years ago, and the entire family was mourning the loss. He had been raised in a children’s home in Nižná Kamenica from the age of three, when his mother had died. He had met his future wife in the nearby village of Rankovce. He had spent years working as a butcher in a meat factory in Košice, which had provided the family with a large modern flat. When the factory had started laying off their employees, Milan’s father had joined his wife’s job, taking care of city’s green spaces.

“My parents sold the flat in Košice for very little money, unfortunately. They became the victims of fraud that was never remedied,” says Milan and continues: “They built a small house in Rankovce. When our daughter was born, we built a four-times-four-meter addition, in which we still live; without running water and with only one room serving as a kitchen, a living room, a bedroom, and a bathroom. It is becoming more and more tight as the children are growing up. All of us need privacy, especially our teenage daughter. We have, thus, welcomed the help offered by ETP in constructing our own house.”

An active builder, Milan travelled to Brussels in October, when ETP Slovakia was awarded the golden Civil Society Prize for the Building Hope Project. At a press conference that followed, he stood in front of the journalists and said: "...We want to live as people; therefore, we have decided to start building our own house... The Project is great! It will enable us to move into a larger house, which, otherwise, I would not be able to afford from social benefits, considering I am unemployed." Before Christmas, Milan appeared on TV, representing ETP in the live broadcast of Advent Slovakia 2014.

"In the new house, I am going to have a kitchen, a living room, a bathroom and a toilet on the ground floor, and a bedroom and two children's rooms on the first floor. We are going to have a solid fuel heater and, in addition, my cousin is building a beautiful fireplace for us. I erected the walls long ago and I have also finished the bond beam for the roof. I have already bought the material to build the roof and the chimney. But, you know, the blocks would be useless without mortar, and the sheet metal would be useless without nails and screws. It all costs a lot of money, which we constantly lack. Building the electricity connection will also be quite expensive... I wake up at nights, calculating how to manage as wisely as possible."

However, Milan Gašpar does not want to think too much about all the things they still need to obtain in order to move into the new house. The entire family is looking forward to the new house very much. Milan is most excited about the fruit trees that he has already planted and a vegetable and flower garden that he is going to grow.



**L**ittle Dominika will not move an inch from her mother. Wherever her mother goes, she follows, and vice versa. They are inseparable. On the day of our visit, Dominika stays in bed with a raised temperature. It is a cold winter day, but the small room is warm from the wood stove. The three-year-old girl pulls her leg out from under her duvet, knowing a caress will follow. When lying in bed gets boring, off she jumps and rests on her mother's lap.

"She is our sweetheart," Agáta Turtáková says about Dominika, holding her in her arms. "She was eight months old when we found her and her four siblings, all dirty and neglected. There wasn't even a piece of bread or a cup of flour in the house. All we could find there was filth. It was so terrible that I could not comprehend it. A woman who loves her children could never leave them hungry and in such filth," says Agáta as she reflects on the events that occurred over two and a half years ago.

At that time, she received a call from Vehec near Vranov that the children of her brother-in-law had been abandoned. The brother-in-law had been put in jail and his wife had left with another man to live in the Czech Republic. Agáta and her husband Miloš did not hesitate for a second and brought the children to live with them in Rankovce.

Since that day, little Dominika, thirteen-year-old Juraj, and fourteen-year-old Viktor have lived with Agáta and Miloš. Their seven-year-old brother Erik and ten-year-old sister Vanesa have found refuge nearby at their grandmother's house. "I don't think their mother will ever come back for the children. She already has other kids with another man. But if she did return, it would be hard for us to say goodbye," Agáta confesses.

Miloš and Agáta also have a daughter of their own, eleven-year-old Vanesa, who suffers from epilepsy and, therefore, requires more care than a healthy child. Still, they accepted Viktor, Juraj and Dominika unconditionally. "Where else would they go?" they had asked themselves. The children from Vehec soon became accustomed to their new family. They used to spend their summer vacations in Rankovce and have always gotten along well with the daughter of Miloš and Agáta. Dominika now calls Agáta "mom" and thinks of her as nothing less than her biological mother. With the older boys, however, it was not always so easy. They were messy, contentious, ill-behaved, they used to fight a lot, and they did not want to study.

"Living with us, they have changed. The oldest son, Viktor, is now getting straight A's and Juraj has become an average student," says Agáta proudly. Both boys spend several hours a day in the community centre, where they study and do their homework.

Children's grandmother, Kvetoslava Turtáková, also takes good care of them. She is highly acknowledged among the people in Rankovce. She is recognized in the community for the Gypsy Spirit Award, which she was awarded for saving a fifteen-year-old non-Roma orphan, who had suffered abuse.

"Pavlinka spent a week at my place. I gave her food, bathed her, washed all her clothes and got her new ones. Afterwards, the authorities placed Pavlinka in the children's home," says Kvetoslava as she recalls the events nine years later.

The single-room house with a kitchen, where the Turták family lives, was built by Miloš with his own hands. It used to be all right, but it has become a little tight since the number of its inhabitants increased. Their feelings about building their house themselves were mixed at first. As other families in Rankovce, they had doubts. Agáta and Miloš make all decisions together, weighing all the pros and cons before taking action. Therefore, they talked about building a new house a lot before making the decision. Agáta was the one who had more courage.

In the spring of 2013, they decided to "take the leap" and started saving fifty Euros each month. "It wasn't so hard, I always managed to put some money aside," says Agáta. In a year they managed to save six hundred Euros and subsequently received a matching bonus. They had enough money to buy a plot of land and some construction material.

In addition, they borrowed one thousand Euros from an American Missionary, Kristen, who lives in the village and helps local women earn their living by crafting souvenir bags and other small items. Agáta is among these women. She studied to become a tailor but the situation in her family forced her to leave school and go to work. Agáta and Miloš took up a microloan from ETP twice, amounting to 3,500 Euros altogether.

In August of last year, their house began to take shape. Miloš and his brothers-in-law spent whole days at the site, including throughout the hot summer. During the summer vacation, the eldest boy Viktor helped in the construction too. Agáta would cook at home, always bringing full saucepots to the site. By winter, the men had the walls erected. “We are moving into the new house in May!,” they rejoiced. As soon as the weather gets warmer, the men will finish the roof and start working on the interior.

In the new house, there is going to be a living room, a kitchen and a bathroom on the ground floor and another two rooms upstairs. Of course, the house will have central heating and running water.

“The upstairs rooms will be inhabited by the children – one by the boys and the other one by the girls. These need to be finished first. Afterwards, we can furnish the room downstairs for the two of us. We want to leave the old furniture here and get new items for the new house. There will only be a big sofa in the living room, the rest of the space will remain free. I am looking forward to putting flowers in the windows. There will be more windows in the new house than we have here, but I won’t mind washing them,” Agáta talks about her plans. The family intends to build in another room after saving some more money.

“I have no words to describe how much I am looking forward to living in the new house,” Agáta says. At the same time, she realizes that she will have to consider each cent before spending it. Every month, Agáta and Miloš give out 80 Euros from their family budget to repay the loans from ETP and Kristen. They will probably need to obtain more money for the addition and the furnishings. It will not be easy, considering Miloš is unemployed and Agáta only receives parental allowance.



**M**ária and her partner Rudo are in their twenties. They never made it further than primary school and none of them has ever had a job. They now live in their own house in Rankovce, together with their parents and four children, but only a couple of years ago, they were still homeless...

Rudolf Tancoš Jr. was among the first builders of self-help low-budget family homes with 3E features – ecological and energy efficient. He managed to build his own house thanks to ETP, which provided a microloan as well as professional guidance. Rudo and his family moved in two years ago. Since the spring, they have also had running water. The solar panels on the roof of their house are a gift from the producers. Thanks to them, the family does not need to pay a cent for electricity. It is a great help, considering the family has to have the microloan repaid by the year 2023. However low their income, the installments are always paid on time.

The microloan, and thus the chance to build, was provided to the Tancoš family after the intervention by the Municipality, which was trying to resolve their catastrophic situation: The family was sleeping at Košice station, they were indebted to loan sharks, and Rudo was addicted to glue-sniffing. When the Mayor of Rankovce, Stanislav Hada, learned about their situation, he could not remain idle; he allowed the family to become the inhabitants of the Municipality, thus saving them from a life on the streets.

When the family moved in, local men took immediate action to “unteach” Rudo the habit of glue-sniffing, worried that the plague would spread in the settlement. Rudo has learned his lesson. The family was assigned a special beneficiary to receive, on their behalf, their benefits in material need and later also their parental allowance. Thus the family has learned to manage their finances and get rid of the loan sharks.

“First I was angry that the social worker was allocating me money weekly and going shopping with me. Now she trusts me and gives me the money in cash. She has done a great job of teaching me to manage my money. It is much better to live on one’s own money than to be in debt,” says Rudo’s partner Maria, who is known to the local people as a problem person.

Mária has gone through a lot. She grew up in a poor shack in Kecerovce settlement. At the age of seventeen, she gave birth to their son Kevin. Together with Rudo and his parents, they have struggled ever since. Hoping that she would earn some money, she left Rudo with a little child and moved to England. She had no idea what was awaiting her and was only lucky to get back home, although in fact, she had no real home.

Rudo’s father, Rudolf Tancoš Sr., was very young when he was taught a life lesson. Between the age of two and eighteen, he grew up in a children’s home near Brno. Their mother was living in Rankovce. She had a partner and a lot of children with different men. Rudolf used to leave the children’s home to spend the holidays with her. Each time, he could not wait for the vacations to end to return to the children’s home. There he was led towards becoming a gardener. He enjoyed the job, making a decent living in horticulture for years. With his wife Janka, they lived in a rental flat in Rozhanovce and had only one child: Rudo. Janka had already had ten children with her former husband before she became a widow. She has never learned to read or write. She got her first job at the age of fourteen, followed by twelve years of hard labor on Czech fields.

When Rudolf’s employer started laying off workers, Rudolf was among them. Ever since, he has found no other job, and he is still dependent on benefits in material need. The family was not able to pay for the rental apartment, was evicted and assigned a portable house without electricity, two kilometers from the nearest source of drinking water. However, the portable house was in the way of the local landowners’ association and, therefore, had to be removed.

“We had nowhere to go, so we built a shack near Rozhanovce, where we spent the following two years. Maybe we would still be living there if it had not been for the flood that took away the very little we’d had,” Rudolf Tancoš Sr. recalls. The floodwater receded, but the shack was no longer habitable. The family did not dare to build a new one in the same place, so they had to face the question of where else to go...

There was nobody who would be able to give refuge to all five of them: Rudolf, Janka, Rudo, Mária, and Kevin. Janka’s grown daughter could only shelter the grandmother and the grandson. Rudolf Sr., Rudo and Mária left for Košice, taking a step into the unknown. They spent days wondering around the city and nights sleeping at the station or under the open sky. This lasted for several months. It was a cold November when the family arrived in Rankovce, Mária having been pregnant at that time.

“We are grateful to the local Mayor. He has had sympathy for us because he is a Roma,” Mária says. The Municipality provided a temporary solution; a portable house, which they built close to where their new house now stands.

“The first day I brought the twins, Aneta and Amália, from the hospital, Anetka was bitten by a rat,” says Mária, as she recalls the time spent in the portable house.

The girls are three years old now and they constantly struggle with health problems. Anetka suffers from a neurological disorder and Amálka has a blood formation disorder. What else could be expected, considering they were born to a homeless woman? Mária is taking good care of them, ensuring they attend all the doctors they need.

When the self-help construction of low-cost family homes commenced in Rankovce, Rudo’s house was finished very soon; the father and the son were usually the first ones to arrive at the site in the morning, working diligently to be able to move in as soon as possible.

The youngest child, Janka, was the first one to be brought from the hospital to a decent home. After Janka’s birth, Mária decided not to have any more children and, therefore, underwent sterilization. The eldest son Kevin is already seven years old. He was overexcited when he was about to enroll in school. “He is so much looking forward to going to school,” says Mária, hoping that Kevin becomes a good student. She hopes that her children will never have to face the same hardships again.

Rudolf Sr. has remained faithful to his occupation; he has grown a vegetable garden by the house. “I am going to grow fruit trees as well to provide vitamins to the children,” says Rudolf, rejoicing at the chance to be useful again.







Zuzana wound up in a terrible financial situation due to her alcohol problem. After recovering from her addiction, she completed the ETP Financial Education course and the Savings Program, after which she took up a microloan. She managed to get back on her feet, reconstruct her flat and find a job. She is non-Roma, but she comes from a socially disadvantaged environment. Had she learned how to manage her finances at a young age, she might have spared herself a lot of misery in her life.

A lot of families living (not only) in marginalized Roma communities grow up under similar circumstances to those Zuzana's children had to face. Having such a terrible role model, how are they supposed to know that there is also another way to live if no one ever shows them how?

Denisa had a very difficult childhood, each night sleeping over at other people's places, together with her homeless mother. After getting married, she spent ten years living with her family in a shack. The ETP Savings Program enabled the family to build a real home. They have reconstructed an old house, in which they now live, enjoying a higher living standard.

František and his wife Viera wanted a decent home for them and their family. They took up a microloan and began to build a new house themselves. However, the situation in their family changed – more children were born into their marriage, which placed higher demands on their family budget, causing them to postpone their construction plans for a couple of years. Still they did not give up. When their house was finally finished and the microloan repaid, they felt huge relief. They constantly keep improving their new home.

Milan and Milada want to ensure a decent life for their three children, who are very bright. Therefore, they used the money from the Savings and Microloans Programs to start building their own house themselves so that they no longer had to live in a place with a single room to serve as a bedroom, a living room, a kitchen and a bathroom. They appreciate the ETP Projects very much, aware that without them they would not be able to afford a new home.

Miloš and Agáta have their own daughter, yet they decided to invite another three children in their home, following the problems in their family. Their little house ceased to be sufficient, so they decided to build a larger house, where their children would have their own rooms. They were able to do so thanks to the ETP Savings and Microloans Programs. They were aware that what followed were years of repaying their installments and tightening their belts, but that did not stop them from following their dream.

The family used to sleep at a train station. Before that they had lived in a shack that had been destroyed by flood and later in a rented flat, which they had lost with their loss of employment. Today they live in their own family house, which they built very quickly themselves, using an ETP microloan. At first they were not able to handle their finances; Mária's benefits in material need were allocated to the family by a social worker, which is no longer necessary. Rudo's family has been repaying the microloan regularly, always in time. The story is a great example of how municipalities should be helping their inhabitants.

In most of the stories, three activities overlap: the Savings Program, the Microloans Program and the self-help construction of family homes which become clients' asset. The houses in Rankovce were built to be safe thanks to the special social counseling provided throughout the construction, which included the assistance of a Construction Coordinator and Supervisor provided by ETP, whose role was to oversee the entire construction process. At the same time, the future home owners were assisted by social and community workers, who helped them deal with related paperwork both before and during the construction.

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTERRELATED PROGRAMS OF FINANCIAL EDUCATION, THE SAVINGS PROGRAM AND THE MICROLOANS PROGRAM<sup>7</sup>**

The comprehensive services provided in ETP Community Centres in towns and villages where the Savings and Microloans Programs have been implemented involve efforts to improve financial literacy, provide children and adults from MRCs with information on available financial services, and endorse basic and advanced financial education.

The clients of the Savings Program have completed at least one (in some cases two succeeding) financial literacy and family finance planning courses (*Don't Be Afraid of Money* and *Plan Your Future*). Both courses were tested in our Community Centres and were very well accepted by the inhabitants of MRCs. To make it easier for teachers to implement the courses, ETP created the Financial Education methodology which also contains students' worksheets.

Based on our extensive experience we recommend that **Financial Education is to be included as a formal subject in the curricula of elementary schools situated close to segregated settlements. We also recommend for Financial Education to be included among the mandatory activities provided within the framework of the National Project of Community Centres.**

### RECOMMENDATION No. 8

### **ENABLE THE REALIZATION OF THE SAVINGS PROGRAM FOR THE INHABITANTS OF SEGREGATED COMMUNITIES NATIONWIDE<sup>8</sup>**

The results of the Savings Program indicate that clients and families who are long-term recipients of the so-called benefit in material need and those with very low income are able to save the desired amount, provided they are motivated and supported in the right way. Based on our eight-year experience verified by almost a thousand clients, **we consider the Savings Program to be a suitable tool of social work; hence, we propose the Savings Program to be systematized by being included into the existing social policy tools.**

Successful clients of the Saving Program achieved statistically more significant employment rate compared to unsuccessful clients. The survey conducted by the Faculty of Economics of the Technical University in Košice indicates that the successful clients were 2.5-times more likely to find employment compared to the unsuccessful clients. The questionnaire results show that **every sixth successful client has found employment after completing the Program.** By contrast, only every fifteenth unsuccessful client has succeeded in finding employment.

Hence, we recommend that a client who saves long-term and on a regular basis towards a previously agreed goal (e.g. **to improve the quality of housing, attain higher education and/or ensure better employment**, etc.) becomes eligible for a **so-called savings bonus (conditional cash transfer).**

After a client has fulfilled the prerequisites to become eligible for the bonus, it may be paid out via the Offices of Labor, Social Affairs and Family as one-off social benefit or one-off conditional cash transfer.

**We also recommend that the so-called housing allowance is to be also provided to citizens who are not eligible at present but are actively trying to solve their housing problem by way of specific-purpose savings to construct their own house self-sufficiently.**

The tools that we have validated as functioning models should, in our view, become incorporated into public policies because unlike benefits in material need, they are **social investment**.

<sup>7</sup> The proposal is in line with the Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Integration of Roma up to 2020, Priority Area D.2.5 Financial Inclusion, Partial Goal 2: Increase the protection of marginalized Roma communities against loansharking activities and illegal practices of credit companies using systematic terrain work, education in financial literacy and a comprehensive revision of the criminal law and financial measures aimed at customer protection.

<sup>8</sup> The proposal is in line with the Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Integration of Roma up to 2020, Priority Area D.2.5 Financial Inclusion, Partial Goal 1: Improve access to financial services.

## RECOMMENDATION No. 9

### **CREATE A NEW PRODUCT WITHIN THE EXISTING STATE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT FUND SCHEME TO OBTAIN (PURCHASE OR CONSTRUCT) A FLAT IN A BLOCK OF FLATS OR IN A FAMILY HOUSE<sup>9</sup>**

Specific-purpose zero-interest microloans provided to improve the quality of housing support the clients' efforts to ameliorate their lives within their own means. Since 2008, in cooperation with Habitat for Humanity International and the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities, ETP has provided microloans ranging from 1,160 € to 6,160 € to 542 low-income families to get access to drinking water, reconstruct roofs, install heating, insulate existing houses, build bathrooms or construct new legal houses. Prior to obtaining a microloan a client has to complete the Financial Education courses. The lower-amount microloans usually take four years to be repaid, while microloans above 6,000 € are to be repaid within the maximum of twelve years.

**We recommend that the Ministry of Transport, Construction and Regional Development of the Slovak Republic and the State Housing Development Fund extend the range of persons eligible to receive support from the State Housing Development Fund to also include persons from socially disadvantaged environments.** It is recommended that the new product, i.e. the new type of support, is to be part of the existing scheme of the state support financed from the State Housing Development Fund (SHDF), to enable also poor families from socially disadvantaged localities to get a low-interest (1%) loan to buy a flat in a block of flats or in a polyfunctional house, or to construct a family house. Today such opportunities are only available to the lower middle class and orphanage' leavers<sup>10</sup>. According to our experience, the maximum budget to construct a family house is significantly lower compared to the current SHDF limit of 60,000 €; based on our experience with 16 families from Rankovce, it does not exceed 15,000 €. The loan is to be set to be repaid within the maximum of 30 years, with the monthly installments of 50 €.

## RECOMMENDATION No. 10

### **ENDORSE THE SELF-HELP AND SELF-FINANCED CONSTRUCTION OF FAMILY HOMES THAT ARE TO BECOME CLIENTS' ASSETS<sup>11</sup>**

Unlike previous State practices, the approach taken by ETP engages the future home owners in the construction process, including the financing. The ETP revolving fund only covers the microloans provided for the purchase of construction materials and for hiring experts for specific tasks (e.g. electricity connection, water supply, plumbing, heating installation, etc.). Construction of a house built self-sufficiently on a legally-settled land that is to become the builders' asset has a **significant transforming effect** on the clients. It results in the overall change of one's behavior, the motivation to find and retain the employment, the improvement of health and hygiene habits, the enhancement of children's school performance, the increase of clients' respect within the local community, as well as their acceptance by the majority.

Based on our experience, **we recommend that the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities includes the model of self-help and self-financed construction of houses that are to become builder's assets in the list of activities financed in the new programming period of 2014-2020, in line with the Strategy for Roma Integration up to 2020 and other documents. To improve poor-quality housing of people from socially disadvantaged environment, we recommend that the Ministry of Finance incorporates a Microloans Program as one of the financial instruments included in the**

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> State Housing Development Fund – An Overview of the Provided Support in 2015 [EN]: <http://bit.ly/1SXOZbZ>

<sup>11</sup> The proposal is in line with the Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Integration of Roma up to 2020 and other documents.

**sub-fund called the Fund of social funds of development capital (FORSFOR), currently under preparation, within the framework of Slovak Investment Holding (SIH).**

We emphasize the potential of this model to **reduce tension between the majority and Roma communities** in the long term. The innovative model of financing the self-help construction of houses that are to become one's asset (using microloans in combination with clients' own savings) **substantially saves public finances**, including the funds allocated for the construction of rental apartments, as well as social benefits. Out of the total number of 34 adults (16 married couples, 2 adult children) who took out a zero-interest microloan for the purpose of self-help construction of family homes, only two persons had full-time employment in 2013. After the 16 families joined the Program of self-help self-financed construction of family homes, the situation has changed significantly: as of September 2015, nine people, i.e. 4.5-times more than previously, have found employment. Disposable income of households in the locality has increased by over 64%. In addition, the State has saved approximately 10,500 € in benefits in material need in 2015 compared to the amounts paid out to the same families in 2013.

## RECOMMENDATION NO. 11

### **SPECIALIZED SOCIAL COUNSELING PROVIDED TO THE BUILDERS<sup>12</sup>**

We recommend to the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family and the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities **to extend the scope of competence of field social work to include also housing assistance and to appoint a specialized social worker for the communities to provide professional social counseling related to the activities connected to the administrative process of acquiring legal housing.**

Within support for independent housing as one of the support social services, the current legislation enables the provision of assistance for managing households and their finances; however, it does not include social assistance during self-help construction, nor does it specify the scope of help to secure one's rights and legitimate interests; especially, in administrative procedures related to self-help construction.

Based on our previous experience, we recommend to provide, throughout the realization of the self-help self-financed construction, **an allowance to cover the salary of a new employee** (e.g. the employee of a local municipality or an NGO) – **an Expert Construction Coordinator** – and the necessary costs related to his work, such as personal protective equipment and working tools and equipment. The role of the Expert Construction Coordinator is to help the builders during the self-help construction process to adhere to the conditions set forth by the architect and project designer, as well as to the resolutions of the approved project and construction documentation.

<sup>12</sup> The proposal is in line with the Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Integration of Roma up to 2020, Priority Area D.2.2 Employment, Partial Goal 4: Supporting social integration using also the support of terrain social work and activity of community centers in municipalities with a high percentage of members of marginalized Roma communities, for consultancy services, education and leisure activities.

## RECOMMENDATION No. 12

### **CONTINUE TO ALLOW JOB APPLICANTS TO PERFORM THE VOLUNTARY SERVICE WITHIN THE SELF-HELP SELF-FINANCED HOUSE CONSTRUCTION<sup>13</sup>**

Since May until November 2015, three jobseekers participating in the self-help self-financed construction of family homes in Rankovce were performing activation works in the form of voluntary service (§52a of Act No. 5/2004 Coll. on employment services). Under the supervision of an Expert Construction Coordinator, two out of three builders had managed to finish the construction of their houses during their six month voluntary service to such extent that they were able to move in with their families.

Hence, we recommend the model of support for self-help home constructors to be spread nationwide to the marginalized Roma communities in localities where appropriate conditions for a given project are created (availability of land and support from the local government).

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<sup>13</sup> The proposal is in line with the Resolution of the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic issued in response to the Request of ETP Slovakia on December 18, 2014: <http://bit.ly/1I7rSeC>







**L**ucia Csiszárová from Veľká Ida was twenty seven when she was left alone with six people to take care of: her minor siblings Simona, Laura and Denis, her adult but legally dependent sister Marcela, and her own teenage daughter and four-year-old son Marko. Lucia has one more legally dependent brother, who had left to live with his sister in Ireland.

Their father died a while ago because of a weak heart and alcohol issues. Their mother worked for U.S. Steel and took care of the entire family selflessly. “She had a hard time living with my alcoholic father,” Lucia recalls.

“One day, she had a high fever, was taken to hospital and died of pneumonia three days later. We were all devastated; it was especially difficult for Denis, who was only twelve at that time, but life had to go on...” the young woman contemplates.

Lucia was desperate and unhappy, but despite all the sadness and hopelessness she knew that she could not let her siblings be taken to a children’s home. “We have always lived together and I will not let it change,” she decided. She became the official guardian of her brother and sisters, and though unemployed, she was determined to take care of them.

Days were passing quickly as Lucia was occupied with her everyday routine around the big family. She had to take care of bringing water in, cooking, washing and ironing their clothes, cleaning the house, struggling with the lack of money and worrying about the future.

Simona and Laura were good students and they both decided to apply to a secondary school in Košice. Lucia was happy on the one hand, but worried about their shrinking family budget on the other, as the girls needed to cover their travelling costs to school. Lucia felt relieved when Simona received her Certificate of Apprenticeship as a tailor and became independent. Laura is also going to finish school to become a cook and waiter soon, and after that she would like to continue studying to be able to graduate as a confectioner. Lucia does not object at all; she supports Laura’s plans.

Despite the difficult circumstances, Lucia would still find time for entertainment. It was obviously a good thing to have done because that is when she met Róbert from Moldava nad Bodvou and fell for him. Róbert graduated at a high school to become an agricultural equipment operator and later wanted to become an engineer. He applied for university but did not enroll because his girlfriend got pregnant and he had to choose work instead of studies. However, their relationship did not work out so they broke up. When Róbert met Lucia, he was single, but had already had a child. Lucia was honest about her family burden and relieved to find that he was all right with it. Had he not accepted the situation, she would have given up their relationship.

“I would never leave the children,” Lucia says.

Fortunately, she never had to face the choice; Róbert valued Lucia’s commitment to her relatives. Soon, the family welcomed Lucia’s and Róbert’s own daughter Pavlínka... and said goodbye to Marcela, who passed away. Soon her place in the household was taken by their mentally challenged brother from Ireland. The family now occupies a rental home provided by the Municipality in the “new” settlement in Veľká Ida. It consists of a large living room and a kitchen. There is running water in the house but no toilet. The family is satisfied to live there because their former house was in worse condition and with no running water.

“Tidži is like a father to me,” says sixteen-year-old Denis and explains that “Tidži” is Róbert’s nickname. Together, they do the homework, have “manly” discussions and laugh.

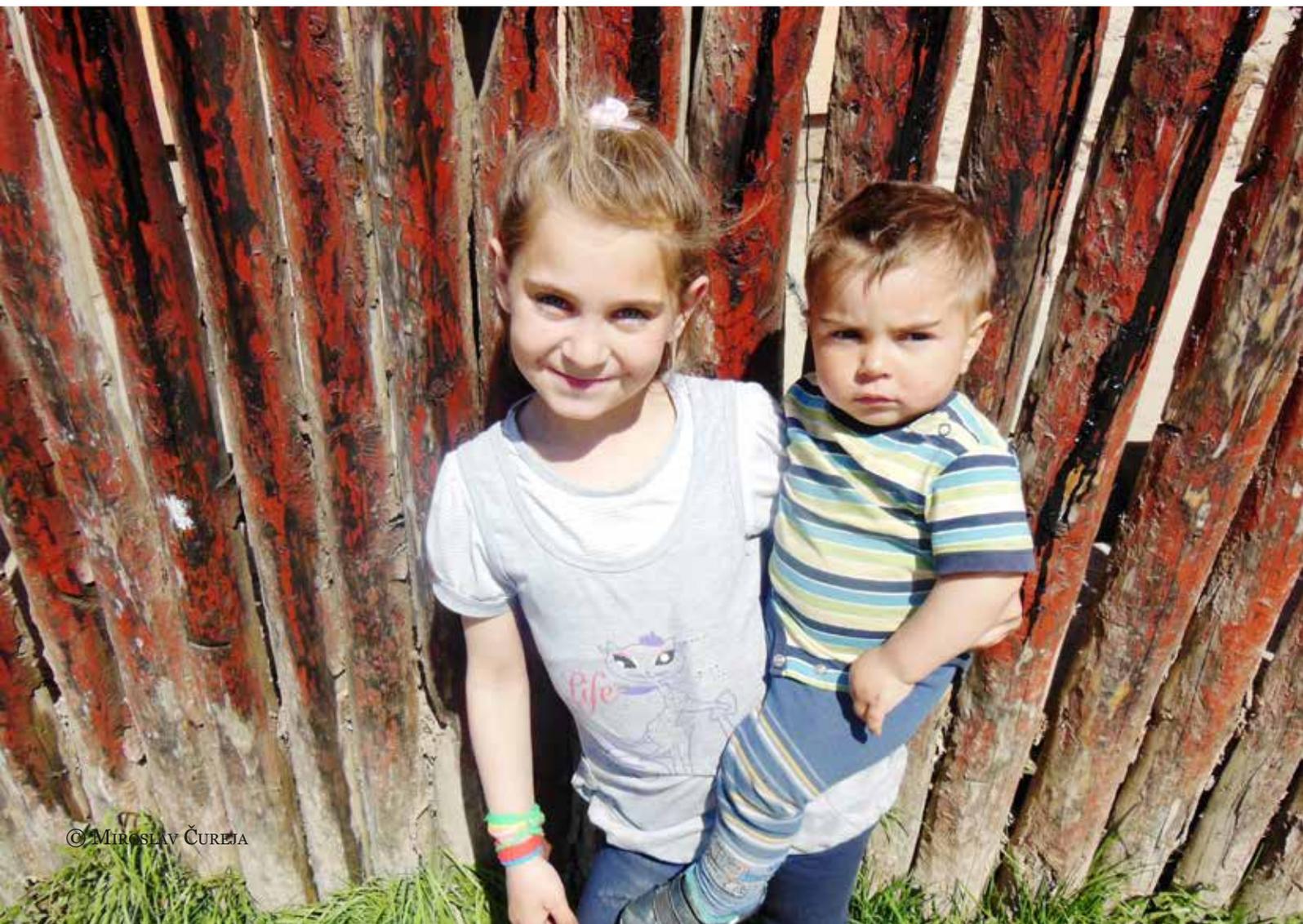
“I cannot claim the position of Denis’ mother. No one can take the place of our caring mom,” Lucia says.

The family situation got more complicated half a year ago when Róbert lost his job and was not able to find a new one. Especially the beginning of the new school year was very difficult. Denis enrolled in a high school in Košice with hopes of becoming a sports manager. Lucia and Róbert praise his ambitions, yet worry about the financial aspects. In their family, every cent matters; Denis realizes that and asks only as much as is really necessary.

At the end of October he approached Lucia Lučaiová, the head of the Community Centre, in which he enjoys spending his free time, and where he had passed the Financial Education course. Denis met Lucia to confess about a problem which had been worrying him since September: “Please, help me. I have no money to buy the textbooks and workbooks for the English and German classes. My sister cannot afford to pay for them. I am ashamed to admit it at school, I have been receiving bad grades because I am unable to prepare for classes.”

Denis’ appeal was not left unnoticed; on the same day, an ETP call to raise funds for Denis’ textbooks appeared on the donation portal [ludialudom.sk](http://ludialudom.sk), asking people to support Denis’ cause. The funds were raised within an hour and they also covered Denis’ outstanding 80-Euro contribution to the classroom fund he had been constantly reminded about. The leader of the Community Centre got in touch with Denis’ class teacher to explain the issue and make sure the boy was not considered reckless. Denis enjoys going to school and to achieve good results, he works with an ETP mentor.

The extensive family of Lucia Csiszárová has had one problem solved, yet new problems keep arising. At the same time, however, precious moments of love and happiness are coming to life.



## STORY RECAPITULATION

Lucia was young and unemployed when she lost her mother and was left alone with five siblings and her own son, all within three days. Together with her partner, whom she found later, they take exemplary care of all the children. The family lives in a very modest way, yet their lives are filled with mutual love. In the face of the serious problem, Lucia was helped by an understanding community worker.



**FACILITATE BRIDGING TWO SEPARATE WORLDS – ONE OF STABILITY (THE MIDDLE CLASS) WITH THE ONE OF INSTABILITY (THE POOR INHABITANTS)<sup>14</sup>**

Since 2008 ETP has been using the *Bridges Out of Poverty* professionals' development program to improve the relationships between public employees and the inhabitants of marginalized Roma communities. The *Bridges Out of Poverty* training program is designed for social workers, teachers, municipality employees, labor office workers, police members (including municipal police), public officials and other professionals. The training program aims to familiarize the participants with basic features of intergenerational poverty, i.e. with the environment that shapes the behavior of MRC members.

A lasting improvement of relationships between the inhabitants of MRCs and the employees of labor offices and other institutions is to be achieved by transforming the mindset of the employees and by raising their awareness about the environment from which their clients come from. *Bridges Out of Poverty* training contributes to changing attitudes and breaking stereotypes. It is especially beneficial to people with less experience with Roma communities but also for those who have experience, yet are bound by stereotypes and negative attitude towards their clients from MRCs. The concept of *Bridges Out of Poverty* training is viewed by those involved as one of the innovative tools of social work.

**We recommend that *Bridges Out of Poverty* training is to be included as part of the mandatory activities for field social workers, community centre workers within the National Project of Community Centres, as well as for the employees of Offices of Labor, Social Affairs and Family and other public institutions whose role is to assist the inhabitants of socially excluded communities.**

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<sup>14</sup> The proposal is in line with the Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Integration of Roma up to 2020, Priority Area D.2.2 Employment, Partial Goal 3: Improve the relations of Roma community members with Labor Offices and other institutions using better and broader consultancy services and even increasing the number of employees.



**E**ight-year old Evička Duková has got plenty of toys – stuffed animals, dolls, even a motorcycle... The most beautiful of all her dolls is called Soňa. Evička named her after the leader of the ETP Community Centre in Krompachy, Soňa Soláková. “We had a good time playing, reading and writing together,” the little lady explains.

“Soňa would always come out on the street in front of the Roma houses and the children would follow her into the Community Centre. They enjoyed going there so much. It is a pity that the project has finished; we will miss the Community Centre,” adds Ivan Horváth, a field social worker and tutor, who led the Crafts Workshop for older kids at the Community Centre. He is familiar with the lives of the people from the settlement on Hornádska Street, where the interview took place, but he also knows the people living in another three settlements in the town of Krompachy. He introduced us to the house of Júlia Gáborová, where we met little Evička. “She has been taking excellent care of the disabled child,” Ivan talks about Júlia’s commitment to her granddaughter.

Evička is a first-grader who has been struggling with health problems since early childhood. She suffers from muscular dystrophy. At first sight, there is nothing abnormal about the way that she walks. When she pulls up her sweat pants, her legs still seem all right; yet they are not. The girl gets tired easily and, therefore, she is not able to walk long distances. The school she attends is situated on a hill that is quite far away, but Evička enjoys going there, no matter the distance. All her classmates are Roma, while non-Roma students attend a different school. When Evička feels unwell, her grandmother helps her get to school and back. In the winter, when the snow fell, the journey was even more difficult for Evička. That was when the grandma put her in a stroller and off they went.

Evička has lived with her grandmother since she was born. Her mother lives in Germany, where she has found a man and leads a decent life. She supports Evička by sending her money on a regular basis. With her husband, who is non-Roma, they sometimes also come to visit Evička. The girl’s own father lives in the settlement, but he already has his own family. The daily care of the little girl has been left to Júlia from the very beginning. Every single day, she cooks, keeps the household tidy, and does the laundry and ironing. She frequently takes Evička to Košice to visit doctors and undergo regular treatment. “With so many visits to the doctors, it is sometimes difficult for me to perform the 32 hours of activation works assigned to me. If I skipped some of them, I would not receive the benefit in material need, which I depend on. My job is to tighten screws in a factory,” Júlia explains. Júlia has started going to work only recently. Before she turned fifty, a new regulation was enacted, which obliged all unemployed persons to work in order to be eligible for statutory allowance. Júlia had never been employed before because of a life-long hearing impairment, due to which her hearing is very limited.

At the age of twenty, she found a man and gave birth to a daughter and two sons afterwards. Her husband left her for another woman, with whom he did not stay either. He had already gone through two relationships before the children grew up. The family used to live in the settlement, in a wooden house they had made from old railway sleepers. This sort of dwelling was common back then. Today, there is only one left in the settlement: that of Júlia. However, she no longer occupies it because she has moved into her parents’ house. With Evička, they now have a large kitchen, a spacious bedroom, and a bathroom with a toilet. “We used to have nicer furniture, but it was all destroyed by water,” she says. Five years ago, the local river reached the level of 1.8 meters and flooded Hornádska Street. It destroyed all the dwellings, and their inhabitants received one thousand Euros from the State to repair them. “I don’t know how I would manage to make it without the help of my daughter,” she contemplates.

Júlia has lost her two sons. “My older son Ján was hit by a train seven years ago and died a year after. Miroslav was killed in a work accident, leaving behind a wife and four children,” she continues. During our visit, Júlia’s daughter-in-law came to visit with her child, who is the same age as Evička.

“The local men used to break down the concrete blocks from the old bridge near the settlement. They would pull out the steel rods and sell it at the scrapyards to earn some money. When a concrete chunk fell on Miroslav, it killed him instantly,” Ivan Horváth explains the circumstances surrounding the tragedy of Júlia’s younger son. “No one has ever been prosecuted for leaving the huge pieces of concrete unenclosed and accessible to the public. After Miroslav’s death, nobody dares to break them down any more,” Ivan continues. Júlia had to cope with the loss of both her sons within a single year.

However, she still has her little Evička to light up her life. Each morning, she styles her hair into a lovely braid. The girl can be crafty sometimes: “She usually calls me ‘grandma’ but when she wants to get something very much, she calls me ‘mom’ - and that’s when I can’t say no...”

**M**ost of the little girls and boys who enrolled the first-grade class of Natália Pilipčuková at the Primary School in Veľká Ida could not even hold a pencil in their hands. This was a consequence of their underdeveloped fine motor skills. For some of the pupils it was the first time they had ever seen a pencil. Many of them had not learned their first words of Slovak until the zero grade. They had no experience with toys and did not know how to play with them. They were amused by the water running from the tap and the magic bubbles they could create from soap. At home, in contrast, they have to carry water in buckets from the only well situated on the edge of the settlement.

The weakest pupil in the class was Sebastián, a boy from a family with many children and a lot of issues. The parents neglect their children, they do not speak or play with them; there is no talk of toys in their home. Both Sebastián's parents are unemployed. Each month, they waste all their social benefits on alcohol within the first couple of days and have nothing to put on their plates for the rest of the month. The entire family lives in one room, where the children keep witnessing scenes not meant for their little eyes. Yet Sebastián's family situation and inability to speak Slovak were not his biggest problems; the boy was not able to speak at all. He could barely utter one or two Roma words. After fifteen years of experience with teaching Roma children, Natália was pretty sure that the boy had a speech disorder that required treatment.

The boy was lucky; he was randomly selected for the FIE (Feuerstein Instrumental Enrichment) Club run at the Primary School by ETP. At the Club children from the zero grade are attended to by their class teacher and a remedial teacher for three lessons each afternoon. The children enjoy the playful and stimulating way of learning and they make fast progress. Towards the end of the winter, Sebastián could speak a little bit, improving with each month. Gradually, he was able to utter an entire sentence; it just required patience to understand him. His teachers saw that he needed the specialized care of a speech therapist; without it he would remain an outsider for the rest of his life. His family could not afford the specialist, but the solution was found: ETP Slovakia published a call on the crowdfunding portal Kamoši z webu ("Friends from the Web") and managed to raise the required funds. Thanks to professional help, Sebastián is going to learn to speak so the future can open up in front of him.

"I am worried about what it is going to be like once he becomes a teenager. He needs the support of caring parents," Natália Pilipčuková contemplates. She honestly loves her pupils, approaches them in a professional manner and patiently answers all their questions. She would like to see them succeed in life, so she strives to come up with creative ways to explain everything they need to grasp during the first grade.

"We analyze each letter as we study the alphabet. For instance block capital 'A' consists of one horizontal line and two inclined lines. 'B' is a combination of a vertical line and two curved lines. Based on the letters the children have already learned, we draw conclusion for the new letters to study. When I introduce small h to the children, they already know how to write an 'l' and an 'n', so they can easily understand that we get an 'h' by combining these two letters. In this way, the children grasp and remember the alphabet more easily. Thanks to the worksheets of the Feuerstein Instruments, the children learn how to draw, connect and combine lines, and it helps them to develop not only their fine motor skills but also combinatorial thinking, logic, imagination, preciseness and patience. They have successfully grasped the concept of geometric shapes and are able to analyze each shape. I am so glad that they have developed inner motivation and that they really want to learn."

Before Natália went through specialized training, she was upset that the children coming from the settlement were so unsuccessful, but she was not trying to get to the root of the problem. "Now I know that it is all a consequence of the environment in which the children grow up and develop; and therefore, they require special attention. At the time they enroll in the first grade, they are at the level of three-year-old children from the majority population. The teacher talks to them in a language they do not understand, which is a huge obstacle. The children start to lag behind the day they enroll in school, their problems keep escalating, they are stressed out, feel uncomfortable at school and develop a dislike for studying."

Natália is convinced that the education provided by ETP helped her better understand "her" children.

Before the class starts to work with the primer, Natália has to teach the children how to use it, emphasizing that the way they read should not be chaotic; they need to read each line patiently, from the top down, from left to right. This way she leads them towards systematic work and stimulates the development of useful character traits. According to the example of Mr. Feuerstein, who emphasized mediation, she sometimes devotes a whole lesson to discussing a single picture with the class. Together

they search for connections, drawing new conclusions from the known facts; they learn how to learn, think, talk and apply their knowledge. The little first-graders like the atmosphere of the FIE Club and they love their teacher. They take longer to understand the new content, but as soon as they have grasped it, they are eager to continue to explore new things.

The situation becomes complicated when children skip school, sometimes as a result of their parents' neglect, other times for sickness. In a settlement children who are sick do not stay home in bed; instead they spend the days out, poorly dressed. Jožka is a first-grader, who was among the weak students from the beginning and she was off sick frequently, throughout the entire school year. Every time she returned to school after a period of sickness, she felt ashamed about falling behind, and it was getting worse with each time she fell sick again. It was very difficult to motivate her to enjoy studying again. Unfortunately, Jožka's family could not be counted on to provide much support; Jožka's mother is a widow who has nine children, lives on social benefits and struggles to make ends meet. Besides, Jožka faces one more problem: her poor eyesight needs treatment and she needs to wear glasses. The situation has been going on for long but Jožka's mother had never paid any attention to it. Not until it became a problem at school, where Jožka could not see what was written in the books or on the blackboard. The question was how to cover the costs of the treatment, glasses and bus fares to attend doctor's appointments. ETP responded by publishing a call on the Kamoši z webu ("Friends from the Web") crowdfunding portal and managed to raise funds for the cause. Jožka is also among the students attending the FIE Club. Her mother often comes to sit in her daughter's classroom during the Club, and she is not the only one; other parents and grandparents of the first-graders come to see the children study as well.

"If only we could accept all children to attend the afternoon Club!" says Natália. Other children from the class would like to be a part of it too; they are pleading their teacher to admit them. However, it is not possible; for the purpose of the method verification, it was necessary to divide the class into two groups of pupils, with only one of them to attend the FIE Club, and then compare the results. The research findings so far have unquestionably confirmed that the children attending the FIE Club are ahead of the rest of the class. This should give a serious signal to other schools attended by children from less-stimulating or segregated environment to apply the Feuerstein Method of Instrumental Enrichment in their teaching as well.

## RECAPITULATION OF STORIES

Júlia raised three children of her own; two sons who died and a daughter who left to live abroad. Yet Júlia has not remained alone: she still has an eight-year-old granddaughter. Evička is handicapped and loved by her grandmother completely. Our qualified and understanding community worker has also found a sensitive way to reach out to her and little Evička returned her affection by naming a doll after her.

Natália Pilipčuková has fifteen years of experience working with pupils from marginalized Roma communities. She has always been an excellent teacher, yet it was only the specialized education that made her realize the significance of the influence of the environment in which children are raised on their development. Great tools currently helping her in her work are the Feuerstein Instruments, thanks to which her pupils learn faster and with joy, achieve good results and enjoy going to school. For two of the pupils in her class, who have special needs, ETP published calls on a crowdfunding portal to raise funds and help them solve their problems.



**SPECIALIZED EDUCATION FOR TEACHERS<sup>15</sup>**

Children from marginalized Roma communities (MRCs) very often start their compulsory school education without any prior pre-primary education. The environment in which they are being brought up usually does not provide appropriate stimuli for the development of pre-school skills, the Slovak language or logical thinking. In their home environment the children mainly speak Roma and their upbringing is based on different patterns of behavior, which are in conflict with optimum social learning and engagement in prosocial interactions with peers and adults.

For the successful integration of pupils and students from MRCs into formal schooling, it is necessary for teachers and other educators to use methodology and effective tools that take into account the needs of pupils and students coming from segregated communities. Based on our experience with the application of innovative education methods Grunnlaget, Montessori and Feuerstein Instrumental Enrichment we **recommend that the educators working with pupils and students from MRCs have a chance to acquire specialized education that enables them to better understand the environment and socio-economic conditions of excluded communities. The specialized trainings demonstrate how to conduct lessons in a manner that develops pupils' and students' abilities to learn and accelerates the process of their adaptation to the formal education environment.**

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<sup>15</sup> The proposal is in line with the Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Integration of Roma up to 2020, Priority Area D.2.1 Education, Partial Goal 4: Improve the care of pedagogical staff and specialists and increase the proportion of teachers and specialists fluent in Romani (local community dialect).



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Our recommendations are aiming to create society that embraces all people with no individuals struggling on the edge. We believe that today's commonly used expression "marginalized Roma communities" that very accurately describes dismal living conditions of marginalized people will soon become an obsolete phrase.

Some of the brave individuals with wise minds and compassionate hearts who have joined us on our journey have shared their thoughts in the following pages.

**“How are the children from Roma communities supposed to improve their reading and practice what they learn at school if they cannot take their textbooks home?”** Mgr. Mária Heveriová, a remedial teacher, questions the common practice at our schools. Mária is the soul of ETP’s Feuerstein Instrumental Enrichment After-School Club that takes place at the Primary school in Veľká Ida every afternoon. The nine first-graders attending the Club are hungry for knowledge. Even though they spend almost the entire day at school, they do not want to go home in the afternoon. **“They see our work as play,”** she says.

**What kind of magic causes the children to feel so comfortable when they are around you?**

I treat each child as a unique human being and I like every single one of them. I know that each child has their destiny, specific character features, problems, and gifts. They come from the environment that shapes their personalities. All the same, the people these children interact with, including their parents, are shaped by their environment as well. By that I mean that even though children may appear similar in some aspects - have a similar diagnosis - each of them is different. Every child grows up in a certain family system, which is important to recognize and work with. Together with children and parents, we build relationships based on respect, honesty and acceptance of each person, including their limitations.

**You are talking about an individual approach...**

For every child, I try to create a distinctive program to fit their needs; a program that helps them progress and avoid frustration and demotivation; one that respects their boundaries. In the learning process, the child should experience success and a sense of moving forward.

**What methods do you apply?**

I apply stimulation programs and Montessori education, which copies a child’s development and offers a system of tools allowing for great variability. It leads towards autonomy, builds self-confidence and a sense of self-competence. Further on, I continue with the Feuerstein Instrumental Enrichment methodology, which I view as an extension of Montessori; it develops autonomy, self-competence and thinking even more.

**Why do you consider the application of Feuerstein Instrumental Enrichment appropriate in work with Roma children?**

Feuerstein Enrichment is beneficial for everyone. It teaches how to understand and process information, it leads towards systems thinking. It eliminates superficiality and impulsiveness. It does not teach quantity of facts; it teaches how to acquire knowledge.

**What are the specifics of work with the Roma children in Veľká Ida?**

These children fascinate me and teach me a big lesson. They are so excited and ‘wow’ about everything new. They have a wonderful virtue: a desire to learn. When you are authentic, without pretense and superiority, and you take the children for who they are, they give you the same back. They come from a less stimulating environment which does not prepare them for our school system. They constantly need to practice the skills necessary to master reading and writing. What is especially important is to work with the parents so that they encourage their children to study. Also significant is early intervention – not just shortly before school enrollment.

**What does your work give you?**

It shows me people and their values in various life situations, which, in turn, brings me to reconsider my own values. It teaches me to be grateful and humble, it makes me think. It shapes my personality and leads me towards believing that mercifulness, esteem and respect are, for me and for others, a better way to choose than the one imposed on us by this world.

**Why have you become a remedial teacher?**

One might say it was a coincidence. However, there is no such thing as a coincidence... Everything has its purpose and meaning. Therefore, I say that God has led me towards choosing the profession. I wanted to become a doctor, but I was not admitted to a medical school. I enrolled at the Faculty of Education of Comenius University; it was right after the change of the social system that they reopened the study program after many years. Remedial education did not develop in Slovakia for political reasons and it is still not well established within our system. My remedial teaching practice is the only one of its kind in Košice.

**Is remedial education more of curative or educative nature?**

Remedial education deals with upbringing, education, diagnostics and therapy of individuals whose situation is so impeded by unfavorable circumstances rooted in upbringing, social, health or other causes that they are unable to lead a way of life appropriate to their age and find realization adequate to their capabilities. Remedial education does not concentrate on performance; it aims to adjust the limitations of child's development in the most appropriate and stress-less way. It concentrates on helping a child to mitigate their underdevelopment and return to ordinary life.

**What obstacles do you face in your work?**

I try to build an attitude that will not let obstacles bring me down; one that transforms them into challenges and teaches me to search for solutions.

**Your aims and dreams...**

My aim? To learn to accept and love people the way they are; to respect their boundaries and choices, to support them without making judgments, to be patient with myself as well as with others, and not to give myself over to the messianic feeling.

I would be happy to see the message spread that Roma children are capable and have a desire to learn; that helping and supporting them is the right thing to do. They deserve a chance. Our view of them should be unobscured; we need to break the prejudices and lies surrounding them.

My dream is to leave the children I work with, within my practice as well as in Veľká Ida, with the kind of experience that helps them move forward; just as I have been able to progress thanks to the people I have met in my life.

**“T**he conditions of Roma settlements are so bad due to segregation. Their isolation breeds generational poverty,” says Ing. arch. Katarína Smatanová. At a British university, she met a professor specializing in developing countries. She visited South Africa and India as part of her school practice and thus became involved and interested in the issue. When she returned to Slovakia, after finishing school three years ago, she did not want the knowledge she had attained “to go to waste.” She got in touch with ETP Slovakia and fruitful cooperation has begun. Why?

**Were you led towards helping others at home?**

I come from a family of doctors; to help others is the essential commandment in our home.

**What was your motivation to choose the career of an architect?**

Since adolescence, I have known that I want to have freedom in my life; the possibility to travel and gain as much experience as possible, never missing anything important. Architecture gives me that freedom.

**Did your plans change during the course of your studies?**

What was important was that right after the first year I started a practice at a designer’s office and thus became involved in the reality of architecture relatively early. That was when I realized that there was something lacking in our European system of home design – the contact with people, the social dimension of architecture. In Great Britain, architecture is also viewed as a sociological science. Therefore, I continued studying at the British university after completing the Bachelor’s program.

**Are you going to continue working in the field of social housing?**

I am not going to abandon the idea of social housing. I am currently a member of working groups at the Ministry of Construction, where we deal with the issue of social housing on a national scale – in a broader sense, i.e. also considering other vulnerable groups.

I would like to advance professionally in this field as well. Yet there are still many other vulnerable groups for whom this type of housing is not suitable. In other cases, the model does not fit into the town’s space from an urbanistic viewpoint. A big question mark still hangs over the issue of all the spaces “in between the houses,” which do not belong to anyone and, consequently, are often neglected. I would like to take the opportunity to tackle these problems.

The way our particular Project was set with ETP works well. After all, it was finally recognized by the European Union with an award. I understand housing as a process that also involves such things as grasping financial literacy or learning to cooperate. There is a perfect word in the English language to express that notion: empowerment. Whether the house is going to be blue, green or have a shed roof is not important in our Project. In these matters, I would like to leave it up to our future clients to decide for themselves.

**How do you feel in Roma communities?**

They are like my battery chargers; especially “our” community in Rankovce. The people make me laugh and I always get carried away by their immense optimism, humility and desire for life. For my work, it is very inspiring to see how the local people manage with the very little they have, still being able to furnish their homes so beautifully. I definitely enjoy the time spent with them.

**How did you build relationships with the people in Rankovce?**

It was a long-term process on both sides. Considering I am not Roma, I don’t live in the region, and I don’t speak Roma; the initial mistrust was understandable. Through all the activities, innumerable visits, but also unforeseen events, we have managed to prove that we are serious about Rankovce and honestly dedicated to helping the people.

On the other hand, the clients sometimes annoy me by “simplifying” the construction procedures or making unexpected changes in their building projects. We often have to deal with situations that do not commonly occur at a construction site. The language barrier makes it all even worse. In the end, we always somehow manage to cope with the situations and have a good laugh. The language of laughter is universal; it has been the groundwork for good friendships that I have created in Rankovce.

**Are you satisfied with the houses that you have designed?**

One can never be satisfied completely; otherwise, humankind would never make any progress... The project has been constantly innovating; it has evolved according to the clients' demands. I am glad it has been such a "living" process. Even though not all the houses have been completely finished yet, I am happy that people feel comfortable living in them.

**What are you working on at present?**

I am back at the university in England undertaking research. I would like to start up new projects for Roma communities that would improve the public space – i.e. all areas "between the houses," which I view as rather problematic. There are no roads, sidewalks, benches, streetlights, or waste bins; this generates lots of problems – environmental, ecological, but also psychological. Devastated public space creates a negative image of Roma settlements. At present, there are no experts in Slovakia dealing with the issue professionally. Therefore, I am about to finish a dissertation that addresses the issue, and I am currently seeking opportunities to engage in concrete projects.

**What is your biggest dream?**

Professionally, I am intensively working on my dream: to have a well-functioning architectural studio that will inspire by its approach, culture and values, but especially by its production. I want to design spaces where people feel comfortable and buildings that positively influence their surroundings. Similarly to what we have started in Rankovce, I am not going to limit my production and professional services to serve only those who can afford it; I am going to create quality structures truly dedicated to everyone.

Personally, as probably everyone, I dream of having a lot of children and a loving partner; to start a happy, healthy, and functioning family.

**“Equity means a fair approach.” This is the message spread by Equity – a Civic Association led by RNDr. Lýdia Šuchová – which concentrates on helping poor Roma living in the settlements to escape their miserable conditions, improve their living standards, live happier lives and get a chance to apply their skills and fulfill their dreams.**

#### **Why Equity?**

Equity, or a fair approach, ensures that each person, in order to accomplish results adequate to their abilities, is provided the necessary means that take into consideration their starting point in terms of their social, physical, mental, societal and intellectual situation.

#### **Why are you particularly interested in this group of people?**

Five years ago, while I was working at the Government Office, I was assigned a task to prepare a visit by representatives of the European Commission to Roma settlements. I come from Bratislava, and until then, the only Roma I had known were my classmates, with whom we shared the same status. I had never met any Roma who would have been really poor. The first time I entered the settlement I felt afraid and disgusted. The unknown territory made me feel terrified. On the other hand, I found out that there were really kind people living there, so I have gradually started building personal relationships that have lasted until the present.

#### **You have made the first acquaintances in Moldava nad Bodvou...**

I have become close to a remarkable Roma, Irma Horváthová, the head of the ETP Community Centre, who established the Slumdog Theatre. In this drama group, I have met capable young people, who lacked the necessary resources to be able to develop their talents. In my family, we decided that we would help them. We started sending them money, clothing, shoes, and also fees to cover their arts school tuition. I started fundraising among my friends in Bratislava, and I would give Irma the money raised to help the people in the settlement. I have become friends with Irma, her family, and the members of the Theatre. When Irma's daughter Nikola came to Bratislava to study at a university, she would stay in our flat. In Moldava we have created friendships to last for life; we hope that the people, whose presence in our lives has been so enriching, feel the same way about us. Since our first experience in Moldava, we have also made friends in other localities, including Muránska Dlhá Lúka and Plavecký Štvrtok.

#### **What kind of activities do you organize for people from the settlements?**

In my view, I no longer see material help as the most significant kind. I have realized that ordinary human contact, through which people get to know and understand each other, is even more important. With that in mind, we are currently organizing the third year of Black and White Camp that brings together Roma and non-Roma children to spend time together in pleasant surroundings. Another especially significant event organized across Europe is Researchers' Night which takes place on the last Friday of each September. We call it Science in the Settlement; for the entire day, we invite the professors from Comenius University to the settlements to introduce, in an amusing way, various scientific disciplines: physics, chemistry, biology, geology, paleontology, ethnography...

#### **Do people living in poor settlements like these encounters with science?**

They are captivated and watch everything with excitement. No one is going to convince me that Roma children do not want to learn or that they are ill-behaved. For the event, we bring valuable items to the settlement: microscopes, archaeological artifacts, expensive tools, which children show genuine interest in, touch and examine. We have never had anything damaged or lost.

#### **How willing are university teachers to come to the settlements?**

The first time, it was interesting to observe their reactions before and after visiting the settlement. I could see how they were gradually opening up to a new world. Now they are looking forward to the next years. What is especially worthwhile is that they also bring students with them. Our primary mission is to bridge the different worlds, which is the only way to achieve a permanent effect. It is via young people that those bridges can be built.

#### **Equity's activities are rich and they must surely take up much of your time...**

Work for Equity was the reason I left the post of the Director of the Slovak Research and Development Agency; it was not possible to do both jobs well.

**...and you have chosen the path of helping others...**

I am careful about using the word 'help'. Everything I do brings me joy and enriches me; I not only give but also gain.

**A thirty-year-old man from Moldava who lives on social benefits and studies at a secondary school says: If I need a new jacket or a pair of shoes, I ask Aunt Lydka...**

We use various tools according to people's needs. We provide Equity scholarships that are aimed especially at young people who, in spite of their difficult situation, have a will and determination to achieve something in their lives; to graduate or receive a Certificate of Apprenticeship so that they were able to earn their living by honest labor later on. We grant each scholarship on an individual basis, making a personal relationship with a child or a young person and making ourselves familiar with the environment they live in.

**What are your plans?**

Out of the many, I would like to mention one: the School of Second Chance. There are a lot of young people coming from the environment of extreme poverty who have finished compulsory school attendance before the ninth grade of primary school. With the passing of time, they have realized that they do not want to survive on social benefits but rather want to study and gain skills to be able to earn their living. However, they face a big obstacle: they need to finish compulsory education first. Yet the question is: how? The School would address exactly the issue and create conditions for these students to catch up on what they have missed.

“**T**heatre is a great tool that can show us every person’s story has value,” says Jesse Baxter of Dramatic Adventure Theatre (DAT) from New York. This year marks the fourth time DAT actors and volunteers have visited ETP Community Centres to work with children in a series of drama workshops. DAT has also just completed a fifth project in Slovakia for which they workshopped Jason Williamson’s new play *The Rebel Bird* at Nitra’s Divadlo Andreja Bagara. The piece was born out of their collaboration with ETP Slovakia and features three Roma actors and musicians, who they met and worked with during past trips to ETP Community Centers in 2013 and 2014. DAT considers the cooperation with ETP to be very strong and they are glad to be a part of the ETP family.

**How did Dramatic Adventure Theatre’s journey begin?, we ask the artists.**

**Jesse Baxter:** As a working actor in New York City, I felt I did not have much control over my own artistic destiny – as I, like most actors, was constrained by the jobs offered. In 2006 I spoke with a friend who runs an organization in Zimbabwe called Forgotten Voices. I had an idea to work with the young people his organization serves, to listen to and remember their “forgotten voices” by performing plays they would write. My wife Mary K, who comes from a more organizational background, thought this might be something more than a one-off project – it might develop into an organization. Soon a lot of artists were showing interest in the program, and the next thing we knew, we had a company.

**So the first journey of DAT led to Zimbabwe?**

**Jesse Baxter:** It was not that simple. In January 2007, the first plays were supposed to be ready. We were set to perform the plays that coming summer and in March we still had not received any scripts from Zimbabwe to start rehearsing. I got in touch with my friend at Forgotten Voices, who explained that the country was facing huge problems: there was famine; doctors and teachers were on strike; and inflation was at record highs. Kids were not worried about writing plays; they were worried about surviving. The reality of life for these young people hit us hard! We began to doubt whether theatre was the right thing for a community that was suffering like this. But at my core I knew that theatre could be powerful, as I had seen its impact in my own life. We realized that this idea was still good, we just needed to change the approach: we needed to engage more deeply with these communities in need – building up both the individual and collective voice by working with individuals to tell their own stories and sharing with them theatrical tools that can enhance creative problem solving and imagination skills. We knew we would not solve the major problems being faced, but we could help an individual find their voice, tell their story, and overcome the fear to raise questions and venture solutions. These are skills that create good students, students who go on to become good citizens, citizens able to stand up and be a strong voice for their community.

**Besides Zimbabwe, you run your Programs in Tanzania and Ecuador. Why have you chosen Slovakia too?**

**Jesse Baxter:** One of our goals as a company is to establish DAT on every continent, providing programs that give voice to communities in need. After building a successful and ongoing program in South America, the opportunity to build a similar program in Europe presented itself and I made a case for Slovakia. My first contact with Slovakia, before DAT existed, was romantic: I had a girlfriend here and I would travel often to see her. The relationship did not last, but my love for Slovakia remained. I found the country and the culture to be generally very beautiful, but there seemed to be a great injustice surrounding the “Roma issue,” which we saw proved true upon DAT’s first trip to Slovakia. On that trip, we met ETP and we learned very much about the issue from them. We knew at that point that we wanted to partner with ETP and enhance their efforts to improve the lives of the disenfranchised Roma in Slovakia.

**Jason Williamson:** We work with Roma children to strengthen their individual voices, self-esteem, and sense of self-worth. We achieve these goals by helping them to create plays that reflect their lives, showing them that their stories have inherent value. Wherever we travel, there are, of course, certain cultural differences, but kids everywhere are very much the same. They all want the opportunity to learn, and they all grow from the chance of having their voices heard.

**This year forty-one DAT artists have come to Slovakia. Who are they?**

**Jesse Baxter:** There are five of us who make up the core of DAT, two others that fill out are company and we also work with a team of interns and volunteers. These include professional actors and theatre artists, mostly from New York and Los Angeles, as well as students from across the United States (and beyond). To date, we have taken over 250 artist volunteers on a dramatic adventure abroad, working with over 1,000 children in communities with little to no arts education all around the world.

**Christen Madrazo:** It is not uncommon in the United States to use art to serve underserved populations, but we've found that it's less common elsewhere. We try to bring our volunteers to work with people — both kids and adults — who wouldn't have the chance to engage in theater otherwise. Our volunteers include actors who want to help underserved communities with their craft. They are professionally trained students or professional working artists, who are perhaps aiming for an Oscar or a Tony, but who also want to grow as teachers and as local and international community members, too. While working in each community, our artists draw upon their experiences to create new plays — which we later share with a New York audience in order to spread awareness.

**What does your dramatic arts education look like in the communities?**

**Christen Madrazo:** We realize that the environments in which we work have many “givens” and that there are certain things about the people's lives that we cannot change directly. What we can change is our approach, the way we react to the “givens” in our life. Working with people's stories, we open discussions on characters and characters' choices based on the given circumstances of the story. We don't teach our students lessons on how they should behave; we show them how stories develop and how character choices, setting, and conflict affect stories. We show that stories have authors. The approach encourages critical thinking and learning, and it's also fun! The students enjoy it and typically seem excited that their stories matter to someone outside of their own community, that others are interested in what they have to offer, that others place value on their lives and stories.

**What is the repertoire of DAT at home?**

**Jesse Baxter:** We perform original plays inspired by our journeys and have used just about every genre and form to tell those stories. We bridge our audiences to countries, cultures, communities, and to far away neighbors. We explore the foreign and the familiar, the funny and the sad, the good, the bad, the beautiful, and the ugly. Our plays bring a close human presence to often quite distant places and issues. We don't provide answers; we simply tell good stories that ask interesting questions.

**Christen Madrazo:** One of our programs is called the Global Play Initiative, for which longer, more fully developed plays are shared with a wider audience. Another program is ACTION, for which we travel in fairly large numbers to communities and focus on drama education, while collecting material for our plays. A significant part of our efforts also goes toward yet another program called the Teaching Artist Residencies for which we send a small number of artists to one community for a more significant amount of time. For example, last year, ETP hosted a DAT residency in Moldava nad Bodvou, where three of us taught very in-depth theater workshops for two age groups over a period of three weeks; during this project our students created a series of vignettes about discrimination they've faced.

**What is the response to your work?**

**Jesse Baxter:** Overall, quite positive. For example, our recent production of *A Girl Without Wings*, based on a popular myth from the Andes of Ecuador, received a favorable review from the New York Times. The play did a great job of connecting our home audience to a very foreign reality. We hope that *The Rebel Bird*, dealing with the issue of human trafficking and inspired by our work with the Roma in Slovakia, will also be successful.

**Christen Madrazo:** We have interacted with very friendly and open communities all over the world. Just as much as we teach what we can offer, people everywhere teach us as well; we've found that the people we meet are very proud to see that we want to learn from them, too.

**What are your dreams and ambitions?**

**Jesse Baxter:** We want the quality of our theatrical output to be the same as of the best theatres in the world. We want to introduce important topics that connect people to places, people and issues they would not normally be thinking about.

**Christen Madrazo:** We want our Projects to be sustainable. Our goal is to have programs on each continent and to have steady partners in each location with whom we can resume our work each year or multiple times per year. We don't just show up once without plans to return. Next year we plan to start developing our first ongoing program at home for which we will teach and learn from American Indian populations on Navajo Nation reservations.

**Jason Williamson:** I would like to see the actors we train as children become better and better and to eventually perform in our professional plays. We would like to take, for example, the Roma actors from Slovakia to perform in New York, China or Africa to create a truly international company that does top level work, while also empowering people by taking them all around the world.

**Jesse Baxter** is the Artistic Director of DAT, who founded the Theatre in 2006, with his wife, Mary K. Baxter.

**Mary K Baxter** is the Executive Director of DAT.

**Kathleen Amshoff** is the Associate Artistic Director of DAT.

**Christen Madrazo** is DAT's Education Director and Dramaturg.

**Jason Williamson** is DAT's Resident Playwright.









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