

THE ROMA CHARITY PROJECT
for the Roma Community in Örkő, Sf. Gheorghe, Covasna County, Romania

*/Mr. Franz Schule and a group of swiss citizens/
/The HEKS - Switzerland/The LAM Foundation - Romania/*

A GENERAL VIEW



Sfântu Gheorghe is one of the oldest cities in Transylvania, a geographical region of Romania, having first been documented in 1332. The city takes its name from Saint George, the patron of the local church. The city is lived by 3 nationalities (Hungarian, Romanian and Roma) according to the 2002 census. The population of Sepsiszentgyörgy is around 70,000 inhabitants, with a Roma population of approximately 5,000 (a lot of them are calling themselves Hungarians or Romanians, based on the language they are speaking). Most of them, approximately 60%, live in the north-western part of the town, called the Örkő area. Although there are no particular - visible or invisible - boundaries separating the Roma community from the rest of the population in this district, it is local common knowledge that it is a district inhabited only by the members of this community. This is the district that became the target of the project.

The Roma community living here encounters the following problems:
Unemployment, Education, Infrastructure, Problems with the authorities, particularly with the police, Lack of housing.

The major source of income for most of the families (that can often be very large) is the children's allowance and the unemployment benefit. Some try to look for opportunities for (usually illegal) work in Hungary, where they go as seasonal workers. However, this puts an extra burden on the shoulders of those who remain at home, particularly the wives. Another group tries to make a living by collecting garbage, or paper and bottles for recycling, etc. Many of them are horse-dealers, or have horses as a part of their traditional way of life. However, this creates further problems as they have no pasture that is their own. Until now, they used for this purpose an area in their neighbourhood, outside of the town. However, this territory was parcelled up and offered for the construction of houses. An increasing part of it is now being fenced off by the new owners. Necessity makes the Roma take their horses into parks or children's playgrounds, which leads to negative reactions on the part of the rest of the population. Due to an almost universal negative reaction, the local council decided to impose very substantial fines on the owners of horses grazing in public spaces. Practically, the vast majority of the Roma community lives on the margins not only of the town, but of society in general as well.



Most of the Roma children do not attend school regularly, consequently most of them are illiterate. The school was built as a result of the efforts of a Roman Catholic priest, who managed to convince the Ministry of National Education that a special school for the Roma children was needed in the Őrkő district. As a result a school (named after a saint patron of street kids, Saint Philip of Néri) was built that started functioning six years ago. The building itself functions not only as a school, but it also provides space for a canteen and a consulting room. It is supposed to receive children until the 8th form. At the moment, there are 231 children studying there, between the ages of 6-14 (and 125 children in kindergarten). There are approximately 20 pupils studying in one class. Most of their teachers are young. The school is a state school, its expenses - including the teacher's salaries - are funded by the state. The Roman Catholic Church offers the children gifts, clothes on a regular basis. Even though the whole community - including the children, of course - is Roman Catholic, the children's meal at the canteen (once a day) is assured by a foundation of Erste Bank.

All the houses were built illegally in the district. The land was the property of an agricultural firm (a former state agricultural co-operative), now is the property of the city. Already before 1989, the local authorities tried to solve this situation by building two blocks of flats for the Roma community. However, these buildings did not take into account the particular lifestyle of the Roma population (e.g. that they have horses), their wishes, needs, etc. Consequently, the Roma families that were moved into the blocks by force completely destroyed the buildings (leaving practically only the walls), and moved back to their former houses.

Since the land was not the property of the town for a period, it was not possible to improve - actually, to create - an infrastructure for the area: there is no running water, sewerage, etc. Now the municipality has many projects in this order, most of them using EU funds, and a general rehabilitation plan for that area.

Many of the Roma families have regular conflicts with the police and other armed forces. Since the legal status of the houses is dubious, the police cannot register them properly. There are cases, in which individuals do not possess identity cards, or do not register their new-born children.

The area is overpopulated. There are more than 3000 people living in approximately 260 houses (this would mean on the average approximately 14 people living in a house). The situation can be seen to be even more difficult as far as hygiene is concerned, if one considers the lack of elementary infrastructure in the whole district. The buildings erected lately that are connected to the life of the Roma community are a Roman Catholic church (the whole

community is of this confession), the special school and kindergarten for the children of the district and the Roma Community House.

THE PROJECT

Goal

The idea of the project was born in the autumn of 2009, when a group of swiss citizens, led by Mr. Franz Schule, were visiting the Roma Community in Sfântu Gheorghe, Covasna County. The aim was to give something valuable for those children, who are learning in organized way, who may hope for a better life by education and later to work, integrated in the society.

This idea was materialized in a form of a donation: the visitors were donating 1800 EUR for this project, money which was transferred in December 2009 by HEKS to the LAM Foundation /Ilieni, Romania/, in order to organize and implement the action. In January 2010, the LAM Foundation has collected all the necessary data in order to implement the action: the general situation in the community, the number of officially registered children in the kindergarten and school, the major necessities of those children in the educational process and the possible result of the program.



Implementation

The Foundation has find out, that in the only school of the community is the "Néri Szent Fülöp" General School and Kindergarten in Sfântu Gheorghe (520005 - Brazilor Street no. 46, Covasna County, Romania), there are 125 registered pupils in kindergarten and 231 in the school (grades from I to VIII), they are all very poor, so the have no possibility to buy the basic didactic materials (books, pencils, notebooks, etc.), they have a daily meal offered by a foundation (ERSTE), and if they could be motivated by better conditions, maybe they could be interested to continue their studies later, in high schools.

The final decision – together with the school's staff - was to buy two CD players for the music and language classes, to give a package for every pupil, containing those necessary items, didactic tools and chocolate, and to try to motivate them to stay in the school, to learn and to continue their studies. After the vacation, at the 19th of February, 2010, the staff of the LAM Foundation distributed those goods and packages for all the Roma children attending classes in that school and kindergarten.

Finances

I. "Néri Szent Fülöp" Kindergarten

*Radio-CD player Westwood MP-713A - 1 piece - value (incl. VAT): 121,40 RON.

***Packages for children - 125 p.**

Including/package:

- coloring book 24 sheets Herlitz;
- coloured pencil 12 colours;
- plasticine 5 colours;
- crayon 16 colours;
- Disney surprise eggs;
- bag.

II. "Néri Szent Fülöp" General School

*Radio-CD player Westwood MP-713A - 1 piece - value (incl. VAT): 121,40 RON.

***Packages for children - 231 p.**

Including/package:

- exercise book A5 48 sheets, arithmetic;
- exercise book A5 48 sheets, drawing;
- coloured pencil 12 colours;
- water-colour 12 colours;
- paint brush;
- Pelikan ball point pen;
- crayon 16 colours;
- Kinder chocolate / 8 pieces;
- bag.

Total value of the donation: 7407,21 RON (1800 EUR).



Impact

The reaction of the children was really moving, they were very happy, feeling that somebody cares for them, and they could bring something at home or to use in the school. We think, that it is important to create them the feeling that is good to be in school, it's a different and positive experience. We should continue this project somehow, not only by giving packages, but by identifying other methods in order to keep them in school and to motivate them to continue their studies at a higher level.



We know, that they need much more for a long term, sustainable development, but the first steps are always the most important steps. In the name of the Roma Community in Örkő and the Municipality, we would like to thank for the generosity and help of those who were involved in this project.

Ilieni,
February 26, 2010

Klárík Attila
director

LAM Foundation

