

CARPATHIAN FOUNDATION – HUNGARY

INVESTING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD IS OUR COMMON INTEREST

LOCAL PROGRAMS REDUCING SOCIAL
DISADVANTAGE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD



Carpathian
Foundation



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Introduction

The objective of this publication is to present civic initiatives, successfully running projects and good practices which support early childhood development of children living in poverty in Hungary. There are several successful, promising initiatives that promote early childhood development (ECD) in Hungary. The best-known service in this field is the Sure Start Children Houses. That is regulated by the Child Protection Act since 2013 as a basic child welfare service, which increases the chances of children, and has been financed from the central state budget since 2014. Nonetheless, we focus on local programs, most of those were supported (also) by our Foundation in order to raise attention to early childhood interventions in disadvantaged small settlements and urban segregated areas. We have identified and selected seven programs implemented by civil society organizations, operating successfully for several years, as most of their elements and methods might be useful for others. With this collection our aim is to inspire, and encourage other organizations and individuals to implement and develop similar initiatives, at the same time we also aim at drawing attention to the importance of early childhood development and care for children living in poverty.

Early childhood development seeks to compensate for disadvantages and deficiencies out of shortcomings, poverty, and low educational attainment of parents by creating the conditions and circumstances necessary for the proper development, development and care of abilities and skills for children and parents.

Early childhood is termed by various approaches, but the most common define it as the life stage in 0-5 year. This period of life has a significant impact on the quality of further life stages. The first 2-3 years are crucial, as it is the period of maximum developmental plasticity (1.8 million nerve pathways are being developed in each second¹), and therefore the period with the greatest potential to affect health and wellbeing over the life course. Within this period external circumstances, surrounding environment, impacts, experiences, care or lack of care might strengthen or weaken the nerve pathways. All of these have an influence on human's future development, cognitive and social skills, abilities, health, success, overall the quality of life. Thus it is essential to ensure proper establishment of these foundations and make them sure and solid.

Slightly extending the common limitations - based on international definitions, including the approaches and aspects of UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO)² - we consider children aged 0 to 8, especially those who live in a disadvantaged, marginalized, excluded, segregated community as the target group of early childhood interventions. For these children the earliest and most complex intervention is essential. The European Union also emphasizes the importance of early childhood education and care, especially for disadvantaged children. These lay the foundations for future social integration (education, employment, wellbeing)³.

Early development is shaped by various factors like the lifestyle and conditions of parents, experiences in infancy, caring relationships, family environments, physical and built environments, community environments, environmental toxins, nutrition, stress, and poverty. The most defining factor in the first 3 years is the care that is provided. Nurturing care - as to *Nurturing Care Framework Concept* of WHO - refers to a stable environment created by parents and other caregivers that ensures children's good health and nutrition, protects them from threats, and gives young children opportunities for early learning, through interactions that are emotionally supportive and responsive.⁴

Stable and secure environment necessary for proper early development is often not or less available for families living in adversity for several different but mostly structural reasons. Children experiencing toxic stress, poverty and deprivation in early years most probably will suffer hardly compensable shortcomings. They will become class repeaters, early school leavers and unemployed - those who hardly find their place and paths in the world. Without proper compensation, and mitigation of socio-economic shortcomings, disadvantages; insecurity, social exclusion, and poverty will be transmitted across generations.

Investing in quality early childhood is the most efficient development both in social and economic terms, since it creates foundations necessary for successful progress and social cohesion along the life course, overall, it contributes to an inclusive and fair society, therefore early investment is the interest of all of us.

1 Eliot 2001 – Diane M. Mackie - Eliot R. Smith (2001) *Szociálpszichológia*. Budapest: Osiris Kiadó

2 See e.g.: UNICEF (2017) *Early Moments Matter for every child*. New York: United Nations Children's Fund; UNICEF (2014) *Early Childhood Development. The Key to a full and productive life*. 03/15/2014 *Early Childhood Development. The Key to a full and productive life*. 03/15/2014; Dendoba, Amina D. et al (2014) *Stepping up Early Childhood Development. Investing in Young Children for High Returns*. World Bank Group, Children's Investment Fund Foundation; WHO website: https://www.who.int/maternal_child_adolescent/topics/child/development/en/

3 https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/early-childhood-education-and-care_en

4 https://www.who.int/maternal_child_adolescent/child/nurturing-care-framework-rationale/en/

Local programs, good practices

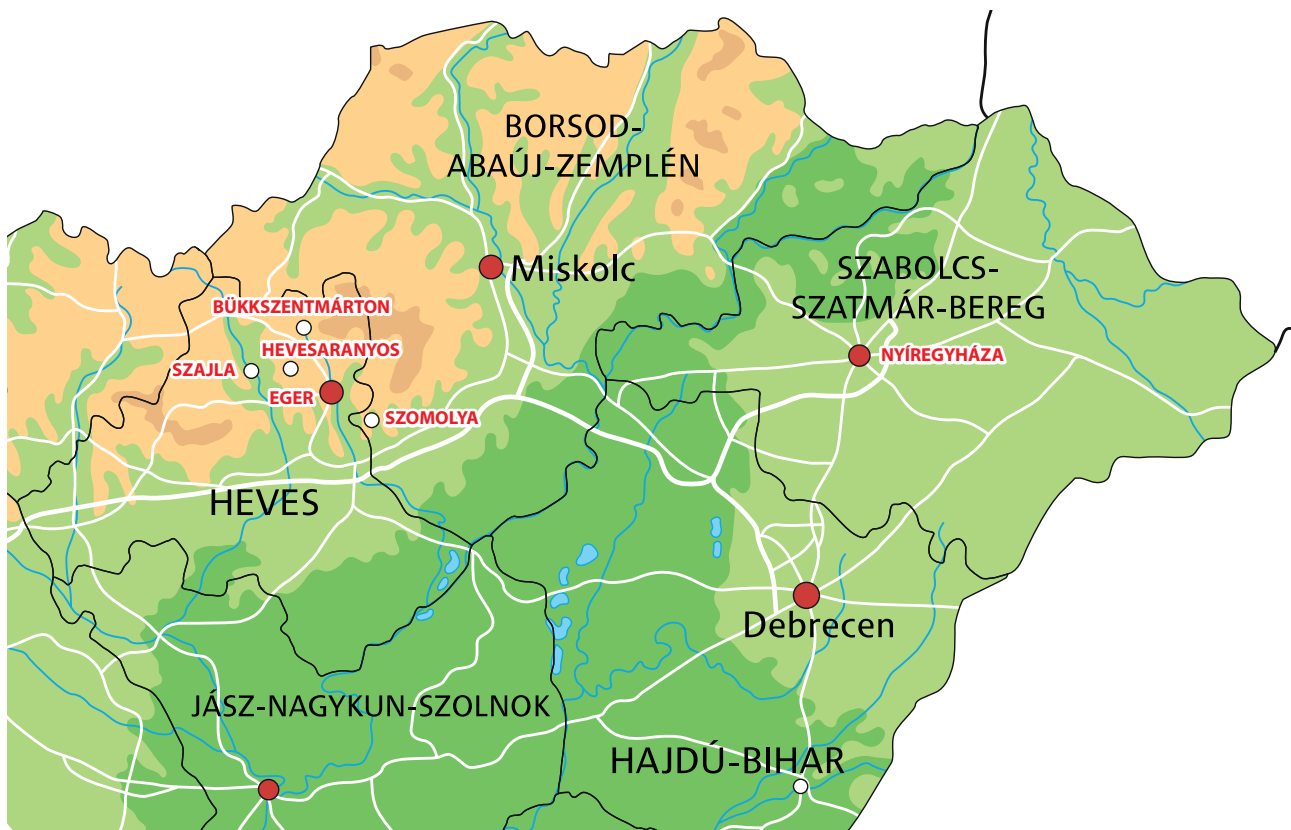
Criteria of selection and presentation

The practices, projects presented here have been identified, selected and evaluated along 8 main criteria, those also provides the structure of their presentation, and were defined with the intention to support adaptation of certain elements, activities and methods.

- We have selected initiatives implemented on different types of settlements (village, small town, middle town, big city) and among environments with different qualities (e.g.: segregated, in a dead-end village without public services, on the outskirts of cities). (It is important that regardless of these factors, at each locality there is a community house or room, facility available for program organization).
- We have been also guided by diversity in terms of the qualifications and competencies of the key project personnel. There are initiatives that are led by highly qualified, trained professionals and there are those that are organized by recognized members of local communities with the help of external professionals.
- The approach and complexity of activities were important considerations, so those programs have been selected that target the whole family with complex means not only small

children, and this is reflected in diverse, interdependent activities.

- The complexity of applied methods and uniqueness of the elements and activities (the innovative components) appear in all selected local practices.
- Measuring and monitoring the effectiveness of interventions and development activities was an important aspect in selection, which is also followed in all cases.
- The involvement of the local community, community-based planning and implementation, as in the previous points, is an important element of all presented projects (with different emphases and extent, and varied methods).
- The quality of cooperation with relevant professionals and networking have been taken into account as well when making the selection (for example the forms and intensity of collaborations with kindergartens, schools, social and health institutions, services, professionals).
- Eventually, we have also checked whether there is any significant factor that influences adaptation and usability of interventions of the projects (legal factors, possibility of further development, need for special tools, etc.).



Give me your hand! Association for the Promotion of Equal Opportunities in Education and the Labor Market



4400 Tiszavasvári, Mester út 16.
AddaKezedKhe



The game is for everyone - early childhood skills development at the Huszár-settlement in Nyíregyháza

The give me your hand! Association was established in Tiszasvári in 2008 with the aim of helping to create equal opportunities in both education and the labor market. Cooperation and common thinking are decisive in its operation. The organization has been engaged into the promotion of domestic and international social integration for a long time, especially into activities promoting Roma integration. Their principle is to use projects to reach target groups with such programs that meet the needs and help the socially disadvantaged people with catch up. It is important that the people they work with are not only participants but also active shapers of programs.

The organization operates in a municipally maintained building in the Huszár-settlement on the outskirts of Nyíregyháza (with a population of 117,000, CSO). This site is hard to reach (railroad tracks and an industrial zone separate it from the city), it is difficult to get to the center from there by public transportation. The site is inhabited by segregated, mainly Roma families, who live in extremely poor housing conditions. Some households have no water as the service provider turned it off due to debt (these families carry water from the public well). Within a settlement development and elimination program the local government renovates municipal buildings and flats, which are rentable at a reduced rate by public debt free families, primarily with small children. Due to the program, there is a constant tension in the residential community, which often impacts the activities of the organization as well. The association addresses this problem in cooperation with professional organizations and institutions that are also present at the site.

The settlement currently has a kindergarten and primary school run by the church. Previously, the educational institution was maintained by the municipality, but the school was closed as a result of a lawsuit filed for segregation of (Roma) students. Kids were divided into several downtown schools, providing them a free school bus service. Later, the municipality made the building available for the church, and the school bus service was discontinued, making it impossible for many children to attend downtown schools. The municipality also built a sports field and playground at the site between 2013 and 2015, but due to disputes over the quality of construction and maintenance depreciation, several toys have not been available for years.

The association implements its early childhood development program for families with small children living in the Huszár-settlement, in close cooperation with locals. In this program, the association conducts group development in response to the needs and claims of families. The main objective is to help children to access quality education and reach their maximum potential. They emphasize the involvement of parents as well as encourage them to make informed school choices.

Main elements of the program:

- Playtime
- Toy rental
- Knowledge Day
- Community events
- Support group
- Voluntary parent group
- Supervision

Play time sessions are organized twice a week with the aim to improve parental competencies and to let parents experience the importance of play in family life. Through playing together, parents get to know their children better and experience such situations that were missing from their childhood. The goal is to make families spend more quality time together, thereby strengthening cooperation between parent and child, with the help of toys.

The Toy rental is a community place where parents can rent special toys for development and books, filling in the gaps at home and ensuring the regular (home) development of children.

The program pays special attention to strengthening parental skills; thus, several programs are directly addressed to them. The bimestrial community events focus on improving life skills, key competencies, and identity. At Knowledge Days (once a month) parents can talk to invited experts about various topics chosen by them.

A voluntary parent group was formed, whose members (former participants in the program) help newly involved young parents by knowledge and experience transfer. For the program staff and participating mothers, a specialist provides supervision; they prepare children's input measurement and individual development plans (kids' progress is evaluated in case analysis). The association works closely with public institutions and service providers in the field of early childhood development, together they established a support network. Professionals regularly join family programs organized by the association that strengthens relationship with the local community.

In the program, social pedagogues and pedagogical assistants map the relationships of children and parents and identify potential problems. Professionals with a wide range of expertise and knowledge support each other in the implementation of the programs, work directly with children and parents, and monitor the results and impacts of the program (e.g.: individual development plans, input measurements).

Equipment was purchased to support kids' home improvements (e.g.: shape puzzle and color puzzles, building blocks, memory cards, puzzles, playdough, beading kits, ball tracks, coloring books, press kits, etc.). These toys are expensive, but essential as special program elements that directly support children's development. (Developing and maintaining the toolkit therefore requires relatively significant resources.)

The Association of Village Builders in Bükkszentmárton



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 📍 Falu-Szépítők-Bükkszentmártoni-egyesülete



Children's Island

The Association of Village Builders in Bükkszentmárton was established in January 2013 in Bükkszentmárton with settlement development goals: improvement of local human resources, strengthening the cohesion of the village and the relations between Roma and non-Roma people. They also aim at cooperating with the surrounding villages. The association regularly organizes meetings to discuss local problems, in which the mayor and representatives of the Roma self-government take part.

Other community programs are also implemented on a regular (monthly) basis.

The association acquired knowledge and practices necessary for implementation of various community programs and activities and projects within the "Seven Villages, One Network – Cooperation of Marginalized Villages on the Border of Three Micro-Regions" project led by the SZETA Eger Foundation. Their current

center, Children's Island, was set up in a well-accessible municipal property by a project supported by the EEA/Norway NGO Fund (2015-2016). The settlement house was renovated, furnished, and equipped so it hosts a variety of activities and community events, and now it plays an important role in the daily life of locals, both parents and children.

The population of Bükkszentmárton, a dead-end village in Heves County, is 249 (HCSO, 2019). The official rate of Roma is 15 percent (HCSO, 2011), but otherwise about a third of the population of the village is Roma. The nearest town is Bélapátfalva (2900 inhabitants), five kilometers away. The municipality does not have independent public administration and public service institutions. Public transport services are irregular, at certain times of the day no bus enters the village at all. There are no institutions serving children in the settlement, therefore small children care specialists, kindergarten teachers and pedagogues are not available for parents locally. Children are transported by bus to kindergartens and schools to the neighboring towns. This solution does not allow or significantly complicates the cooperation between the parent/family and the educational institution for the development of children. Thus, parents with a low level of education are left without help and guidance in raising and developing their children. If children are underdeveloped according to their age, they cannot turn to anyone for help. The integration of children with disabilities into school is difficult and probably they will lag their peers in learning.

The long-term objective of the local early childhood development program by intervening in the life of families with young children and their development is to prepare kids for school, to establish successful school performance and the acquirement of marketable knowledge and skills in later life. This, in the long term will interrupt the process of poverty reproduction.

The program directly aims to provide occupations and services for children and parents in Bükkszentmárton that support the proper development of children according to their age characteristics and needs.

Main elements of the program:

- Playhouse activities, learning support
- Family days
- Summer camp
- Trips, cultural programs

The main goal is to improve the movement and speech of children under the age of 3, to reach school maturity for the 4-5-year-olds, and to support the learning of 6-8-year-old children. The program seeks complexity in the sense that not only children are targeted; but they reach out and educate those, too in the wider environment. Concerned parents and association members are assisted with knowledge transfer, development of skills and abilities necessary for the conscious education and care of children.

In the playhouse children are mainly involved in creative activities and can learn new techniques (e.g.: sticking, playdough, painting), which develop their dexterity, fine motor skills, creativity, self-expression, perseverance and motivation. Additionally, they can gain new knowledge in a playful way (e.g.: quiz questions, contests,

word puzzles), their general knowledge expands, which has a positive effect on their later school performance. As part of the program, several trips are organized, and cultural programs are visited (even in the capital).

The monthly thematic family days (e.g.: Children's Day, Santa's Day, Christmas, carnival, cooking competition, local knowledge competition) support strengthening family and community cohesion. These events also address parents whose children do not attend the playhouse programs.

Each year, summer camps based on different concepts are organized by the association's volunteers and parents, with the participation of 15-20 children.

The settlement house is open to children and parents on weekdays and Saturdays as well; even when there are no organized, guided sessions. In this case, children are free to play board games, playdough, paint, draw, play word puzzle; in good weather they can play the trampoline, table tennis, ball games, and the conditions for learning and reading are also provided by a local member of the association. The community feels close to the Children's Island, they love to be there, they help to tidy and clean up after the events; the fathers also take their share of the technical tasks (they assemble the trampoline and the basketball hoop and also help with landscaping, mowing the lawn). The program implementers consider parents' involvement an important factor, as quality time and joint actions have building effect on both parents and children.

Once a week the playhouse activities are guided by an external professional (social pedagogue) who also monitors and documents children's progress. If lag is detected, more attention is paid for the child, to ensure that group grows together. On weekdays, the local colleague leads the activities under the guidance of the professional and with her background support. In 2020, during outbound restrictions and lockdown due to the pandemic, the local colleague had a key role in organizing, communicating with and supporting parents (as the external professional was not allowed to hold programs).

From the view of adaptation, it is important to note that the local colleague is a member of the community, and although she does not have a higher education, she has acquired the necessary competencies for organizing and guiding activities and programs with the help and continuous professional support of external experts. Creativity is also such, as new ideas are always needed.

Another important element is the community site that hosts the association's programs, which means permanence for children and families attending the programs. There are numerous games supporting proper development on Children's Island that are missing from the homes of many families. Trampolines, table tennis tables, sandboxes and other indoor and outdoor equipment play an important role in developing children's movement and mobility.

Although the activities are successful, according to the association's members, more external programs would be necessary for the children and parents to move out of the village, to "see the world", to gain experiences.

Laskó-spring Association

Laskó-forrás
Egyesület
Hevesaranyos

📍 3322 Hevesaranyos, Szabadság utca 21.
📌 Forrás-Laskó-Egyesület



Creative game for school maturity

The Laskó-spring Association was established in 2013 in Hevesaranyos, on the northern border of Heves County, with the primary goal of creating a strong and active local community. The association wants to become an organization that can have a say in local decision-making and issues that affect the inhabitants of Hevesaranyos, including the poor and Roma. With their fundamental activities, they intend to promote the improvement of the quality of life of the local Roma and non-Roma population; they try to compensate the lack of public, family and social services. They pay a particular attention to building the local community: the association is proud of its Roma dance group of local young people, which greatly contributes to strengthening the cohesion of the local Roma community.

Hevesaranyos is a one-road (with a dead end) village with 577 inhabitants (HCSO, 2019), there is no public administration and institutions at the settlement. 35% of the population declared themselves as Roma as to the 2011 census (HCSO, 2011); the estimated rate is much higher (around 50%). 14 percent of the working age population is unemployed (NES, November 2020), which is more than three times higher than the national average. The majority of the population is low-educated, unskilled and long-term unemployed. There is a one-group kindergarten in the village (with 15 children), most of the pupils study mainly in another village, Egercsehi and just a few of them in Eger. Apart from kindergarten, there is no other public service that supports children, families with children or daily problems. However, such services would be much needed, as some children have learning difficulties and there are significant number of children and pupils with special educational needs (SEN).

The local early childhood development program intends to fill the gaps or compensate difficulties that are caused by lacking services for children, and to strengthen parental competencies and skills. Further objective is to transfer knowledge and skills to local young people, who are also expected to volunteer (these young people have already implemented several of their own initiatives).

Main elements of the program:

- Individual and group activities with the participation of parents/mothers
- Family days
- Summer camp
- Leisure and cultural programs

Individual and group activities for stimulating children are organized several times a week in the community house of the association (under the guidance of the program manager, and with the participation of local voluntary parents). The activities aim at reaching two age groups: children under the age of 3 (and parents) and pre-school or elementary school children between the age of 4 and 8. Primarily, the activities serve the evolvement of large muscle movements, language and speech development,

the improvement of cognitive skills, and the replacement of missing skills and knowledge in order to enable children to meet institutional expectations and prevent the evolvement of learning problems and difficulties. During the activities, they proceed according to pre-planned agenda, keep a group log-book, and document children's progress by filling out worksheets. Participating parents and young people provide feedback through questionnaires.

Children do not develop in the same pace, and being on different stages of development when joining to the program is a challenge. That is why the association tries to give everyone as much as needed. More and more parents are involved: they participate in the activities with their children. According to experiences those children perform better whose parents are engaged. So the program leader visits families at home to increase parents' engagement. Due to the pandemic in 2020 many activities were canceled, but the program leader was trying to make the most out of the possibilities hence she held individual sessions and consultations with families, brought assignments and colorants (to improve fine movement) for children, helping to maintain the continuity of the program.

Monthly organized family days tend to make children, parents and the community spend time together. During these events they play together, do common activities, and exchange experiences and information.

Summer time camps complete the program. Last time, in 2019 it was held in Terpes, involving children living in the nearby. Overall aim was to provide daily physical exercises and to ensure cognitive development of the participants, but the main thematic (e.g.: animals, continents, etc.) keeps changing from year to year. Every year, children are looking forward to the camp, from where they will return home with experiences and new friendships.

The program is led by a member of the association who has a secondary school degree. She regularly consults with an external professional (a pedagogue) who also gives lessons once in a week. They have a good relationship with the director of the local kindergarten, and constantly consult with her and concern her suggestions for the activities. The close cooperation is indicated by the fact that the staff of the program was invited to participate in kindergarten programs.

Several locals, mostly youth aged 14-18 (parents of the future) volunteer in the program, therefore the association has started to organize activities, classes, leisure and cultural programs for them.

As a result, children who regularly attend the program are increasingly reaching the level of development appropriate to their age; also, they acquire better and better basic skills; their kindergarten and school performance is improving.

SZETA Eger Foundation - Fund for Supporting the Poor



📍 3300 Eger, Béke út 60.
🌐 www.szetaeger.hu



Development of learning skills at the Béke-settlement in Eger

Since its establishment in 1989 SZETA Eger Foundation - Fund for Supporting the Poor facilitates social integration and mobility of people -especially the Roma- living in poverty, through various means. Their services tend to extend the social and cultural capital of those who have low educational attainment, information deficit, and experience social exclusion.

The Foundation is committed to reduce the social shortcomings of the Roma, with special focus on children and youngsters. They support kids' vocational education; since 1990 they organize summer camps every year, keep tutoring, follow-up kids' development in kindergarten and school; strengthen the opportunities for children and young people to continue their studies and get employed. To reach this goal, they organize several programs and ensure services, though they involve parents and the members of the community as well.

Since 1997 the colleagues and volunteers of the foundation are in daily contact with people living in Béke-settlement. Firstly, they made close contact with the local community of Béke-settlement in Eger (Felnémet), where they established a settlement-type community house, thus ensuring their permanent presence and accessibility. As a joint success of the foundation and the inhabitants that the Municipality of Eger - with the help of a tender - built the public utility system and made further development in the Béke settlement area, greatly rising the quality of life of locals.

With the acquired experience, SZETA Eger Foundation started similar development activities in several surrounding settlements, and since 2013 they organize the 'Settlement Network in Northern Hungary'. The members are NGOs, established mostly by Roma people, with the aim to reduce social exclusion of the local Roma community, especially children and young people. The foundation continuously helps and strengthens the work of these associations (with fundraising, human resource development, knowledge transfer).

The early childhood development program takes place in Béke-settlement, situated in Felnémet in Eger (52898 people, HCSO 2019). (Felnémet district of Eger was a separate village earlier. They were linked together in 1961, but effectively they were built up in the 2000s.) City public transport hits the site, but bus services are relatively infrequent, so access to shops and public institutions is limited. A kindergarten, a school and a library are available in Felnémet, no other public institutions. Many people in Béke-settlement are working, a significant part of them do seasonal work, - mainly as a result of the Foundation's effort - more and more people (mainly youth) work in the primary labor market (with a profession, driving license).

The long-term goal of the early childhood development program is not only to reduce the socio-economic disadvantages of children living in Béke-settlement, but also to help them to reach their full potential by obtaining a proper education and degree of profession for successful social integration. The concrete objective is to develop skills and knowledge of 2-8 years old children - to successfully start kindergarten and school with stable basic skills (writing, reading, numeracy) acquired.

Main elements of the program:

- Children activities (divided into 2 age groups)
- Downtown walks
- Summer camp
- Thematic family events

The program offers individual and group activities for children four days a week divided into different age groups. Within complex skill care (movement, language, communication, cognitive skills) of children aged 2-5 years and those in kindergarten they aim to catch up and to establish the success of preparation for school. They regularly draw (pencil grip, depiction, color recognition, development of fine motor skills), sing, learn rhymes (vocabulary, memory, rhythm), exercise and play (role play). Kindergarten children who attend activities on a regular basis (at least once or twice a week) make great progress in fine movements, logical thinking, and linguistic expression. Kids' personalities open up and they become collaborative.

Children below 5 are supported in learning, and involved into various plays, games, that support their proper development. As a result, students (1-3 graders) are clearly strengthened in numeracy, writing, reading, communication, environmental literacy, and usually fulfill curriculum obligations. The activities are complex, focusing on playful skills and competence development of children each afternoon. Progress of children is monitored and evaluated by group logbooks, observations and art works.

A one-week summer camps is organized in each year primarily for children from the Béke-settlement, but participants are also welcome from the surrounding small settlements.

During the downtown walks that strengthen children's local knowledge, orientation and social skills, they visit Eger's cultural and leisure programs (museum, cinema, puppet theater, lido), or just "take a walk" in the downtown streets that seem far away from the settlement.

Themed family days (with 30-80 participants) are organized monthly to strengthen local community cohesion while providing opportunities for playing together, get-together, expanding informal relationships and exchanging information. One- or multi-day family trips are also organized as part of family days (to such further places as Tihany, Veszprém, Zánka, Budapest, Nyíregyháza, Debrecen).

The program elements are led by professionals (a sociologist with significant field experience, an expert of social policy, a social worker, and a pedagogue) who have been working with segregated families for many years. Next to the professionals, colleagues who are recognized members of the community are collaborating in organizing and implementing the programs.

In the spring of 2020, under the lockdown due to the pandemic, active participation in digital education, continuous access to children expanded the foundation's professional relationships; in particular, cooperation with the concerned kindergartens and schools has strengthened.

The Szomolya Hungarian-Roma Association

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szomaro



„I’m rocking you, my daughter!” – Early Childhood Development in Szomolya

The Szomolya Hungarian-Roma Association was initiated by the local Roma community aiming to improve the local Roma people’s quality of life and social mobility chances, to represent their interests and to be a mediator between the local decision-makers and non-Roma inhabitants. The association - among others - tends to increase the labor market opportunities for disadvantaged people, also, their fundamental services include help with social administration and advocacy.

Between 2007 and 2009 the association implemented a settlement elimination program in Szomolya in two rounds of tenders – with external professional help –, through families living in cave dwellings (cellar houses) were supported to relocate to an integrated living environment.

In 2008 the association bought a property in the village that they use as an office and a community house. Between 2009 and 2010 they operated the regional Roma Service Office supported by a grant. This way they got into connection with the village of Sály (population of 1800 people). Here, as a consortium leader they implemented another settlement elimination program between 2010 and 2011. Later, they also established a local community house – with the help of another grant.

In these community houses they provide free internet and PC usage, also trying to improve the IT skills of parents and children. The association helps locals to do their official and social administration, to improve their social skills, and also provides mental and life management consulting on site. They regularly organize events and leisure time activities such as camps, trips, family and Roma days.

The association implements its early childhood development program in Szomolya. Szomolya is a small village, situated in the south-western region of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County. The closest town is Eger (with a population of 53000). Szomolya has 1538 inhabitants, 17% of them declared themselves as Roma (HCSO, 2011) as to the census concluded in 2011 – although, 35-40 percent of the population is Roma. Most of them are low-educated, unemployed and living in housing and income poverty. The percentage of secondary school drop-outs are high, who typically have children at a young age. Szomolya has a kindergarten - with a capacity of 50 children -, and an 8 graded elementary school. Both of them are segregated, as for years now almost every student is Roma (non-Roma children – even some Roma - attend other schools in nearby villages, towns).

Due to these circumstances the association aims to ensure programs and activities that extend the knowledge and strengthen the parenting skills of young parents (aged 17-28), so they can care and nurture their children more consciously to break out of poverty.

Main elements of the program:

- Parent clubs (involving “Group for parents”, information days, etc.)
- Children activities (divided into age groups)
- Summer camp
- Family days and trips

In order to form a supportive community for and from young mothers the association organizes club meetings every 2 weeks. It gives opportunity to talk freely about recent problems, difficulties, or anything else that has an effect on everyday life. School maturity, caring children, conflicts in kindergarten or school are just some examples of the most frequently discussed topics. From time to time information days are organized when external experts (health visitors, physiotherapists, special education pedagogues) are invited to have a discussion about early skills development, the importance of play and to present motor skill development exercises. The experts also answer to the questions and doubts of mothers.

Programs are provided to children in three age groups:

- “Rocking” primarily for infants and toddlers under 3 with parents. The program leader guides parents and children to jointly execute exercises supporting movement and speech development. The input measurement of children is done by a professional, and they keep a group logbook about the activities which helps monitoring development progress.
- Story telling for children between the age of 3 and 5, where the activity leader reads tales, and kids elaborate those with different methods (e.g.: drawing, painting, performing, puppet shows).
- Playhouse activities for 5-10 years old children with aiming to improve their communication and social skills through board games, group games and hand crafting sessions.

Every summer kindergarten and elementary school children look forward the camp, where they have excursions, play group- and board games and make handcrafts.

Family days and trips are very popular, as they give a chance to deepen the bonds and cooperation within the family. The parents club is popular among parents with infants, but many more parents and other people are interested in participating in these community events that are organized by the association with the active engagement of parents.

The Rocking activities and the parent clubs are guided by the program coordinator, who has a social worker diploma. She monitors the progress of children, prepares agenda for the activities and supports the activity leaders in the implementation. There is close collaboration with the local health visitor, the family service worker, with the kindergarten and sometimes with the elementary school, thus, it can be said that the activities of the organization are becoming more and more known among local institutions and professionals.

According to the experience of the association, the parental competences of the participants have strengthened, their knowledge and skills related to childcare have been extended. Due to the organization and implementation programs, the community of parents has strengthened and a well-functioning, mutually supportive community has been formed. Based on the comparison of the progress monitoring, it is clear that the skills and abilities of children have improved; the bonds between parents and children have been deepened, and common (playing) activities have emerged that contribute to changes in family relationships.

The Pearl of Tarna Association



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📍 Tarnagyöngye-Egyesület-Szajla



Compensating disadvantages in early years in Ó-Szajla

The Pearl of Tarna Association was established in 2013 (by the incentive and within the SZETA Eger Foundation's 'Seven Villages, One Network' program) to advocate for the local Roma community in Ó-Szajla. The main objective of the association is to promote the improvement of social and employment situation of people in Ó-Szajla and to contribute to the development of the settlement. Its fundamental activities include advocacy and community organization; to this end, they organize community programs and events such as the Day of Szajla, Children's Day, Sports Day, 1st of May, and regular, local consultations. The association is a member of the Heves33 Rural Development LEADER Action Group and cooperates with the local municipality and the Roma self-government.

Ó-Szajla is part of a small village of 526 inhabitants (HCSO, 209), called Szajla, located in Heves County. This is the original, old part of the settlement; the new part of Szajla was built later. Still, the two parts of the settlement are physically (also) separated from each other. Two-thirds of the village's population lives in Ó-Szajla; about 80 percent of them are Roma, most of them live in deep poverty. The infrastructure of the old settlement is incomplete, there are no shops, no institutions, and public transportation is poor. The nearest town is Pétervására (10 kms away, 2200 inhabitants), the county seat, Eger is 27 kms away. The kindergarten is located in the New Village, children go to schools in Sirok and in Pétervására.

In 2012 - with external civil support - a community house was established (in a building that used to be a pub) which addressed and motivated people as an open, inclusive space, and increasingly supported their problem recognition and advocacy. The services of the community house (e.g.: usage of computers, internet and telephones; providing labor market information, programs for children) have highly contributed to the local community establishing its own association.

The mothers in Szajla (including Ó-Szajla, and Terpes – a neighboring village) are mostly young, and isolated, with a small relationship network. Traditional habits prevail in their parenting techniques, as they only saw the patterns of grandparents and parents. Most of them missed kindergarten, they do not know children's songs or rhymes, and typically are not aware of their role and importance in the improvement of children. Their homes miss the toys and tools that are crucial to develop one's gross and fine motoric movements, additionally, Szajla has no playground. Children mostly have shortcomings, so they lag behind to their age, have limited vocabulary, and their compliance to rules are uncertain.

The overall objective of the early childhood program in Szajla is to drastically reduce the number of people living in poverty, to interrupt the cycle of poverty reproduction by ensuring the necessary support to children's development. The long-term aim of this intervention is to make children more successful in school, obtain a profession, a secondary school diploma, or even a higher school degree. Therefore, the program activities primarily reduce and compensate for the disadvantages of local children and also create the foundations for their better school performance. The program addresses the mothers, too, in order to expand their knowledge and competencies, to give over patterns, while it tries to shape and strengthen the parental community.

Main elements of the program:

- Child-parent group
- "Play together!" activities
- Creative workshops
- Family days
- Helping families, social administration

The Child-parent group assists local young mothers with the transfer of knowledge and techniques to care for a child. Once a month a professional (pedagogue and expert of cultural- and leisure time instructor) runs the activities focusing especially on improving the small- and fine motor skills, sense of rhythm and visual expression.

The local program coordinator organizes "Play together!" activities once a week, with parents active participation so later on they can practice the learnt techniques, and discuss the recognized problems. During the Creative workshop parents and children craft together through their relationship strengthens and visual skills develop. Once a month, family days ensure for the community to spend quality time together. As part of the program, the association ensures its help for participants who seek support in social administration, in different official affairs, and it provides information and advice.

There are several voluntary mothers who wait for the program coordinator at the opening and help with the preparations and then the tidying, and cleaning. They already definitely feel the community house as their own. They are the true messengers of the program, inviting more and more parents and children. It is an important result, that a strong relationship has been formed among and with the local parents, who are happily take part in the activities and apply what they have learned with their children.

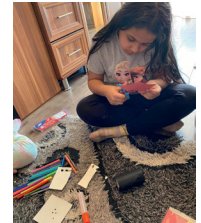
Due to the pandemic in 2020 the colleagues of the association faced difficulties to keep up the communication, because face-to-face meeting was no longer available. However, the restrictions also had a positive effect: the relationship with parents strengthened as the program helped with worksheets and playful exercises in raising children at home. Parents started increasingly recognize their children's strengths and weaknesses, and they discussed it with the program coordinator, who was often approached for advice.

Since the beginning of the program the professional relationships of the association have continuously evolved. They have a good relationship with the mayor, who visited many of their events, and with the local Roma self-government (they help each other's work according to their cooperation agreement). The relationship improved with the local kindergarten, especially during the first wave of the pandemic, as the program coordinator helped to prepare exercises and deliver them to the children. The Association of Hungarian-European Women (MENŐK) supported them to finance their activities and events.

As a result of the program, the verbal and manual skills of children have improved, their knowledge has widened, their performance and concentration have evolved. For that reason, they can start school easier and fulfill the requirements. So far, the parent-child bond has strengthened in many families and the parental competence has greatly extended.

21st Century Roma Women National Association

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SZIROM playhouse in Jósaváros (Nyíregyháza)

The 21st Century Roma Women National Association was established in the spring of 2016 by 10 active Roma and non-Roma women in Nyíregyháza. By 2020, the membership of the association had expanded to 18 people, and in addition to female members, men also joined. Additionally, 12 high school students, Roma students and unemployed Roma women participate in the activities of the organization as volunteers.

Their main goal is to promote the representation of the rights and social interests of (Roma and non-Roma) women by supporting their participation in public life and improving the quality of life of their families. They also aim to reduce prejudices against the Roma, to support the domestic and European integration of the Roma minority, and to find solutions to the social, employment, entrepreneurship, healthcare and education problems of the Roma.

Their core activities include community organization and development, advocacy, furthermore, they pay attention to the preservation and nurturing of Roma traditions and culture, and the organization of cultural and leisure programs. In order to achieve their goals, they have been carrying out significant fieldwork from the very beginning, visiting mainly Roma families living in deprived parts of the town. They talk to them and assess locals' needs and problems in different areas (e.g.: catching up at school, higher education, homemaking, access to housing, mediation). Their activities include prevention (in the field of health, healthy lifestyle), creative self-knowledge and personality development activities, cultural and traditional programs.

The organization works in Nyíregyháza, in segregated housing estates and neighborhoods, primarily in Jósaváros. The city has a population of 116,799 (HCSO, 2019), making it the seventh most populous city in Hungary. According to the 2011 Census, the proportion of the Roma population is only 2 percent (HCSO, 2011), but their estimated proportion (10-15%) is higher than the national average (7-9%). There are also two significant segregated areas in the administrative inner parts of Nyíregyháza: the Huszár settlement and the Keleti housing estate. Jósaváros is also an area of the town that is getting more segregated, and it is already the second most populated settlement in Nyíregyháza. Nearly one-fifth of the city's population lives here; local bus services turn in; shops and educational institutions can be found there. Mostly Roma families live in small apartments of the tower houses -built in the 1970s. The living conditions are crowded (up to 6 people live together on 21 square meters), thus children grow up in a low-stimulus environment. For this reason, there is a significant demand for free services and programs for parents and children (together). The venue is provided by the nearby library and the centrally located community house, the Glasshouse, located on the Ungvár esplanade (by the residence of the target group, at the bottom of the "Tower House").

The aim of the early childhood development program is to improve the abilities and skills of children under the age of 8 living in a segregated site - more precisely in the Tower House-, to facilitate kids' integration in nurseries, kindergartens and schools, and to manage their learning difficulties. Further objective is to reduce tensions between local communities and families living there and the differences between Roma and non-Roma people through community programs, and to strengthen residents' cooperation. It is also important to activate the local community, to let them become a self-organizing group, and to support the advocacy of the families living there.

Main elements of the program:

- Recruitment event
- SZIROM playhouse
- Parents' Club
- Trips, leisure time family programs
- Supervision and professional cooperation

The program seasons start with a recruitment event for the community of Jósaváros, which is enriched by creative crafting, obstacle racing, interactive story processing and face painting.

The local library and the Glasshouse host SZIROM Playhouse where children's activities are organized in two age groups weekly. They play with younger children, under the age of four, and parents through musical, movement programs. Games, interactive tales, rhymes and folk songs, other music lessons and creative program elements come to the fore during the movement and rhythmic activities of the 5-8 years old children. The aim of the activities is to support the development of disadvantaged children at an appropriate pace in an enriched environment, to spend their free time usefully, and to improve their communication and social skills, movement and fine motor skills. Parents also participate in the activities, so they can apply the learned lessons at home. Another important goal is to identify possible skill gaps and, if necessary, refer children to a specialist in time.

In the monthly parents' club parents can meet each other and professionals, they can talk to them freely, while gaining knowledge that helps to raise and develop their children. The club also aims to enable parents to represent and enforce their own interests and those of their children, and to find solutions to their problems. As a result of the club, several parents attended trainings and some of them found a job.

Trips also strengthen common family experiences and group dynamics. In these programs, families can break away from everyday life and, in the meantime, parent-child relationships become stronger.

With the consent of the parents, a portfolio is created for each involved child, which includes detailed information about the child dating back to the fetal period (based on an interview with the parent). Changes and results are continuously recorded in the portfolio, so progress can be tracked. They keep a logbook in the activities, which also helps to record and assess children's progress.

The organization tends to develop itself and strengthen its professional collaborations. They regularly evaluate their own performance; also contacted several NGOs and the local baby-mum club in order to exchange experiences. They are in close contact with the health visitor and other professionals. (In 2020, an employee of the family support service participated in the program as the organizer of the interactive tale program element).

The members of the association have been working with the most disadvantaged families in the Tower House of the Jósaváros in Nyíregyháza for four years. They recognize the shortcomings and problems, and now they can experience that the program has brought regularity to the lives of families, and that the participants have become more open to each other, asking for help and advice from each other. As a result of the program, children will adapt more easily to the rules and regularity, which will help them fit into educational institutions.

Carpathian Foundation



CARPATHIAN FOUNDATION – HUNGARY

Member of the International Carpathian Foundation Network

www.karpatokalapitvany.hu
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The Carpathian Foundation was established in 1995 within an international framework then registered in Hungary as an independent organization in 2002. Its mission is to improve the quality of lives of people living in the Carpathian region, to preserve the social, ethnic, cultural and natural values of the region, to support its sustainable development, especially in the most underdeveloped border regions. The Foundation engages both in grant-making and programmatic activities; it provides grants and scholarships, and run development programs to support disadvantaged rural areas and communities.

Since its establishment, it has donated nearly \$ 16 million to municipalities and hundreds of non-profit, non-governmental organizations. The main strategic objective of the Foundation is to develop human capital of the region it serves and to reduce poverty and social exclusion for the development of deprived rural areas, disadvantaged communities and minorities.

The main objectives of current programs are to support local development initiatives of NGOs and communities operating in disadvantaged rural areas, support vulnerable groups and disadvantaged young people, and raise public awareness.

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