



STEP Bulgaria 2008



Child and Space Association



Junior Achievement
Alumni Club Bulgaria



Университет на 21 вят век



STEP Bulgaria 2008

STEP for Bulgaria 2008

STEP for Bulgaria 2008 is a summer educational program for underprivileged youth living without parental care. Its aim is to provide the participating youth with useful skills for planning their independent lives, continuing of their education and finding an appropriate career after leaving the social care institution at age 18. This summer, in the course of four weeks, university and high-school student volunteers and professional trainers taught course in English, Computer Literacy, Budget and Thought Management, Career Planning and Non-verbal Communication. Established professionals from various fields took part in career-orientation discussions with the young participants.

Who are we?

Among the **STEP Bulgaria 2008** participants are:

- 53 underprivileged teenagers and their supervisors from 7 orphanages in Sofia, Plovdiv, Gabrovo, Berkovitsa, and Provadia.
- 33 volunteers – high-school and university students from Bulgaria and USA
- 5 trainers and 2 psychologists from partnering organizations

STEP for Bulgaria 2008 is a joint initiative of Step for Bulgaria Foundation, “Child and Space” Association, Junior Achievement Bulgaria Alumni Club, and University for the 21st Century. Our partner youth social care institutions include the following children’s homes: Asen Zlatarov, Hristo Botev and Pencho Slaveikov in Sofia; Olga Skobeleva in Plovdiv; Lyuba Teneva in Berkovitsa; Hristo Raikov in Gabrovo; and the Home for young girls in Provadia.

How it all started?

STEP for Bulgaria 2008 was conducted during four weeks: the participants spent two weeks at Rusalka hotel near Varna and two weeks at the National Centre for Management of Human Resources and Regional Initiatives near Sofia. During this period the underprivileged teenagers took part in numerous and diverse trainings, creative workshops, sports events and discussions with special guests. In the beginning, most of us were strangers. Even though some of the students and volunteers knew each other from STEP for Bulgaria 2007, we all had to adapt to the new environment and make new friends. For these four weeks we managed challenging educational courses and hard work while having fun and learning from each other’s experience. Here is the story about the steps we made together...





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Gaining practical knowledge: English Language and Computer Literacy

From the program's beginning, the students were separated into 5 English study groups depending on the level of language fluency. This year we had two beginner groups, two intermediate and one advanced group. Every group is led by one American and two Bulgarian volunteers.

During classes the teachers emphasized group educational games and individual work with every student, which allowed better concentration and comprehension of the material studied. In the beginners' groups the Bulgarian volunteers often helped their American counterparts by providing instantaneous translation. Their students were introduced to basic language and grammar rules. They worked on topics such as:

introducing oneself, everyday activities, the days of the week, seasons, and others. In the more advanced groups, the teachers rarely used Bulgarian and the students developed more profound knowledge of subjects such as: dreams, culture, continuing education and professional orientation.

Besides the language courses in the classroom the students practiced their English by working on computers and gaining new skills. Depending on their level of command of the Internet and Office applications, the students completed various tasks, including the creation of a personal e-mail account, WWW information searches, text typing and editing, and the creation of PowerPoint presentations.

Prathama is a second-year student at Harvard University. She decided to dedicate her summer to volunteer service in Bulgaria in order to gain knowledge of a different culture and to assist the development of young Bulgarians in need. Prathama leads the advanced English group of together with the Bulgarian volunteers Katia and Sofia. Unlike the rest of the American volunteers she is extremely strict and forbids the use of Bulgarian language in class. Although this rule is quite challenging for the students, they readily take part in the lessons and even prefer to skip their break in order to continue their work on subjects like dreams, ambitions, job applications, and family. In her weekly class log, Prathama often expresses her surprise with the students' enthusiasm to learn English and their desire to do difficult exercises.



Ian studies medicine in Cornell University. He is the leader of Group 2 together with Sasho, Iva and Tom. Despite his limited knowledge of Bulgarian, he prefers other means of communicating with his students to direct translation. In the lesson on numbers, Ian's group used competitive games to help the students learn new vocabulary. When Ian and his colleagues find it challenging to keep their student's attention, they alter the lessons according to the students' demonstrated interest and performance. Successful teaching requires constant creativity.



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Practicing independent life skills: specialized courses.

The specialized courses consist of 2 main modules: economic courses taught by trainers of Junior Achievement Alumni Club Bulgaria and practical skills courses taught by trainers of University for the 21st Century. The courses on Budget Management and Economics of Staying in School were taught after the methodology of Junior Achievement and allowed our students to acquire useful skills and knowledge about independent life (how to manage their personal budget; how to plan their career; how to set up their own business, and others). During these courses students discussed their career plans, rehearsed job interviews, participated in an auction of hand-made items created by them and learned important facts about personal budget allocation.

The courses on Thought, Time, and Goal management as well as Body Language were taught by trainers from University for the 21st Century. In these classes the students mastered theoretical knowledge and new practical skills connected to their everyday life and personal resources. Discussions about their dreams and future plans happened between role playing games and screenings of inspirational movies in



Ivailo's classes. Radina constantly used her actor's skills to visualize the different elements of non-verbal communication. The discussions in class were often dominated by the interests and questions of the students who seized the opportunity to learn more from their lecturers. At the end of the training both trainers were surprised at the quantity of information and skills acquired by the youths.



Boris and Radina are the Junior Achievement trainers. Their central goal was that the students learn basic terms and discuss serious topics while having fun at the same time. Their courses included diverse games and discussions. The teenagers were extremely interested to work with two young professionals who shared honestly their personal experience with the young participants. Boris continued his participation in the program even after the end of the economic courses as "The work with these young people and the time spent with them outside of class fill me up with energy. The best moments together are those of having fun together after a long day full of lessons."



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Steps together through shared experience

Step for Bulgaria 2008 included discussions with representatives of various professional fields, who presented their educational and professional experience in front of the young participants. The latter had the opportunity to ask the professionals many questions and consult with them about their personal plans and goals. During the program, the following special events with professional guests took place:

Arts workshop with Stella Canfield

The session took place on July 06. Mrs. Canfield, a Bulgarian artist who emigrated to the U.S. in the 80s and founded her own foundation in order to support underprivileged Bulgarian youth, shared with the teenagers some of her life experience and creative work practice. More than 25 students took part in the arts



workshop and painted their own paintings with pastels and acryl colors by applying a particular technique presented by Mrs. Canfield. The successful result of this session led to volunteers' organizing additional painting.

Discussion about aviation industry with the Regional Manager of British Airways Mr. Emil Delibashev



The meeting took place on July 05. Mr. Delibashev presented interesting facts about flying and airplanes. During the discussion with the teenagers, he had to answer questions such as “What is better: to be a pilot and or an airline manager?”, “How can I become a professional pilot?”, “What are the perspectives for professional development in the aviation industry?”. Mr. Delibashev was pleasantly surprised by the interest and analytical thought of the young participants and expressed his desire to participate in similar gatherings in the future.

Visit to the Varna aquarium

The program participants were welcomed by the administration of the Varna Aquarium. They listened to lecture about the various fishes in the aquarium.



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Program participants see the volleyball game: Bulgaria vs. Finland.

Prior to the game, which took place on July 12, the teenagers had the chance to attend the training session of the Bulgarian national team and to get to know the players. Thanks to the support of the Varna Palace of Culture and Sport, the STEP participants attended the match and watched live the professional athletes.



Meeting with Stoyan Dossev, Essilor Bulgaria

On July 15, the General Manager of Essilor Bulgaria, a producer of optics for corrective glasses, gave a presentation to the participants in Step for Bulgaria 2008 on healthy vision and career opportunities in this industry. The teenagers learned about the main rules for maintaining good vision as well as about the career path of the young managing director of the company. While challenging, the audience proved very interesting for Stoyan. After the meeting he expressed his interest to take part in similar discussions again.

Games and Reflection with Representatives of the “Art of living”

On July 19 and 20, teachers from Art of Living Foundation conducted anti-aggression and positive thinking sessions with the participants in Step for Bulgaria 2008. The activities included discussion and games, interactive physical exercises and a meditation practice. The trainers told presented the four basic qualities of the successful young person and showed them various techniques for developing these qualities.



Flower Arranging Workshop

On July 20, the teenagers interested in flowers and their arrangement participated in a workshop, led by Antoaneta Andonova, a designer of flower decorations. With the help of Antoaneta, the young people quickly learned the main principles and techniques of arranging flowers. With simple materials: garden and field flowers, wet sponge, plastic cups and construction paper they created beautiful arrangements which they gave as presents to their teacher-volunteers or kept them as a decoration for their rooms.



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Professional Orientation through Internet, Session with Blagotvoritel Foundation.

On July 21, a representative of Blagotvoritel Foundation presented their new web site and blog for professional orientation to the participants in Step for Bulgaria 2008. The teenagers had the chance to create their own profiles on the web site and to learn more about the useful resources it provides for continuing their education or finding a job. That way the students managed to see the advantages of Internet for their professional planning and development as well as to put into practice the computer skills already studied during the program.

Meeting with representatives of BTC

On July 22, representatives from the Marketing, PR and HR departments of BTC shared their professional experience through informal discussion with the participants in Step for Bulgaria 2008. Each of the four guests presented to the students their individual life story and career path – diverse roads that led them to work in the same company. The teenagers got answers of questions about the difference between technical and marketing positions, the variety of activities in a telecommunication company, and the working culture at such a large organization.



Meeting with Hristo Mutafchiev

On July 23, the famous Bulgarian actor spent one day with the participants in Step for Bulgaria 2008. In the morning the day started with watching the newest movie of Mr. Mutafchiev, and a discussion of an artistic career in the theater and cinematography followed. In the afternoon Mr. Mutafchiev participated in casting and preparation of skits for Steps Night together with the students and their trainers.

Boyana Cinema Center Visit

On July 24, we were warmly welcomed by the staff of Boyana Cinema Center where the participants in Step for Bulgaria 2008 had the chance to take a look at movie sets and costumes, to dress up as movie stars and to get acquainted with technical devices needed for filming a movie. After meeting with an actor on the day before, the teenagers were impatient to find out more about reproducing real life in a movie. This visit helped them learn about great number of unfamiliar professions involved in the movie industry.

Developing Creative Thinking and Supplementary skills

Every afternoon the volunteers organized various workshops during which the interested students took part. During the first two weeks they participated in photography, painting and dance workshops as well as yoga sessions and sports games. During the program's second part, we had anti-aggression, specialized Internet use and applied arts sessions.





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How Far We Got

At the end of the 4 weeks together, students, supervisors, volunteers and trainers shared what Step for Bulgaria 2008 means for them. For some, the most important thing is the acquired knowledge of English and the computer literacy skills, for others – it's the meetings with inspiring teachers and new friends. The supervisors and the teachers saw improved concentration and desire to work in class, thinking about the future and planning of independent life among their students. For the majority of participants in the program these are the first steps on the way to a successful life outside of the social care institution. Step for Bulgaria 2008 makes possible the established practice of support and mutual aid to continue after the end of the program.

For all participants the four weeks together created new emotions and gave a new meaning to some of their life views and attitudes. Among the most valuable memories from Step for Bulgaria 2008 remain the work and fun together, the newly established friendships, and the care for each other – mutual support and encouragement to adhere to the general rules in the study classes, during the games out of the classroom and in the future when we will keep in touch and will take part in common initiatives.



More about these experiences from the participants in STEP for Bulgaria 2008:

“In this program, the teenagers learned more about their everyday classes during the school year,”
Anelia Petrova, director, Lyuba Teneva Children's Home.

“In my conversations with the teenagers after classes, I understand that they really acquire useful knowledge and skills. After the Body Language course, for example, they constantly show me what my correct posture should be like and how we should eat,” – Hristo Zlatev, psychologist.

“In my classes, I assign to the students various logic games, which develop their analytical thinking. Even if their curiosity is not provoked, they get trained to try to work persistently until they find the right solution,” – Ivailo Vassilev, University for the 21st Century.

“The classes are extremely useful. I am happy that I have the opportunity to learn so many things. Usually people pay to participate in such courses, while we can participate as long as we want to,”
Greta, Lyuba Teneva Children's Home

“Even though in the beginning it was hard to attract the students' attention and to keep them focused in class, by the last session we realized that the teenagers had actually learned the material we taught them,” Boris Kolev, Junior Achievement Alumni Club Bulgaria



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According to the children's homes supervisors, most teenagers not only made progress in their knowledge of English and life skills, but also displayed improved concentration capacity in class. Even though some of the students might not be always present at school, they were much more enthusiastic about participating in the STEP for Bulgaria 2008 courses..



Here's what our volunteers say:

"I was pleasantly surprised by the students' positive attitude. All of them wanted to learn. They listened to us and smiled. This made our work a very enjoyable experience," Eli, American College of Sofia.

"This is the first time I participate in a volunteer program, directed towards underprivileged youth, STEP for Bulgaria 2008 gave me a unique opportunity to come closer to the life and problems of teenagers living without parental care," Albena, High-School of Ancient Languages and Cultures.

"I liked the fact that the teenagers were not afraid to use English outside of the classroom. They were eager to speak with our international volunteers and confidently participated in discussions with them. Often the result was quite amusing! Last but not least, I made many friends – with the volunteers and with the teenagers, who are terrific! They are very communicative and ready to digest all sorts of information," Pressiana, First English Language High-School.

"Thanks to my participation in STEP for Bulgaria 2008, I learned that you can accomplish anything as long as you want it and you believe in yourself. I realized that it doesn't matter what your past is. It cannot determine your future. I saw the persistence and determination of some of the participating underprivileged teenagers. I learned to control my emotions, especially in difficult moments of confrontation," Magdalena, Sofia University

"Walking into town to play soccer, the group of kids chattered with excitement, anticipating the night's match and unraveling their energy as the evening's cooling breeze blew away the hazy afternoon's heat, which hung oppressively over the surrounding hills. For several moments, I was lost in Bulgarian babble, looking confused amid a group of confident smiles and bright eyes. Then a hand slipped into mine and a little voice asked, "kak si, Heather?" "Dobre" I responded, smiling. Despite the language barrier, nothing has stopped the strong connection that has formed between me, an American volunteer, and this group of Bulgarian youth in the STEP program. They have extended themselves to me inside and outside the classroom, sharing their bright smiles, endless enthusiasm, and many helping hands along the way. STEP has provided both of us, volunteers and participants, teachers and students, a chance to reach out a hand and help the other. This exchange is something that is incredibly valuable and memorable, and it happens in simple moments like this... on the way to a soccer match," Heather, Carleton University



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Beyond STEP for Bulgaria 2008

After the successful cooperation during Step for Bulgaria 2008, Step for Bulgaria Foundation, Junior Achievement Alumni Club Bulgaria and University for the 21st Century plan to conduct a yearlong educational program to develop practical life skills for independent life and support career planning of teenagers living without parental care who will soon leave the children's home.

In 2008-2009 we will be working with orphanages from 3 to 5 towns in Bulgaria where we will train motivated teenagers in knowledge of economics and useful survival skills. At the end of the academic year they will have the chance to participate in a two-week seminar (STEP for Bulgaria 2009) with various courses, workshops and meetings with professionals. Through this program they will gain new knowledge and will acquire helpful guidance for continuing their education or preparing for an appropriate career.

Our initiative is open for new partners and new ideas for enriching the program with additional activities, as well as for professionals who want to participate in meetings with the underprivileged teenagers or to offer additional help in their professional orientation.

For additional information, please contact: stepbulgaria@gmail.com

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