Dear friends,

The 17th edition of the e-bulletin marks the beginning of 2017! In this edition you will read about our new handbooks, campaigns, picture books and many other activities intended to improve education quality for the children in our country. Let 2017 be a year filled with many collaborations, successes, children’s laughter, lessons learned and healthy reading and learning habits.

Read and share!

The habit to read is taught from an early age.
— daddy Deniz with his daughter Mia

USAID Readers are Leaders Project

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 USAID Readers are Leaders Project
More than 500 representatives from all primary schools in the Republic of Macedonia attended four regional presentations held at in February at the teachers’ colleges in Stip, Bitola, Tetovo and Skopje. The purpose of these regional events was to present the results from the first nationwide study on early grade reading and mathematics assessment and discuss the main findings. Presentation at the Faculty of Pedagogy in Bitola The EGRA and EGMA assessments with the help of tablet computers, donated by the Project to the schools, were implemented in May 2016 on a sample of 4,000 students from Grade 2 and 4,000 students from Grade 3 from 336 primary schools in Macedonian, Albanian and Turkish language of instruction.

Some of the recommendations for improving the reading and mathematics skills, include:

- More time of the instruction and in the family to be focused on independent and shared reading;
- To organize reading corner or small classroom library, which would be a special place for students to enjoy books and book-related activities;
Children to be exposed to different types of inferential questions aimed at expressing own opinion, interpretation of facts or judgment from an early age to increase the comprehension levels;

Special attention and additional support to be provided to Roma and struggling readers who have reading problems and difficulties in doing word problems even in the upper grades;

Teachers to focus on understanding, reasoning and application of mathematical knowledge, rather than memorization of facts, rules, formulas and procedures;

Use of didactical aids to be increased in the instruction process;

Access to reading materials to be increased, particularly in rural schools and those with Turkish language of instruction;

To revive school libraries and provide more resources for early grade students.

The data collected with the baseline study will help us establish national reading and mathematics performance measures in Macedonian, Albanian and Turkish language as well as in mathematics that will enable monitoring of student progress in acquiring foundational reading and mathematics skills. This information will be of crucial importance for improving the quality of education in the Republic of Macedonia.

The full report from the nationwide study is available here, while the short version is available here.
In December, we published the “Learn Math through Games” – a handbook with 50 activities to master mathematics skills. In this handbook we share 50 activities intended to help teachers in conducting math classes, however the majority of the activities are suitable for parents to use with their children at home.

In the handbook, for each of the activities we offer:

- Classification of activities in the appropriate mathematical focus,
- Explained procedure to prepare materials and conduct activity,
- A list of all required materials for each activity.

The activities are intended for grade 1-3 students, however pending small modifications, teachers from upper grades can also use. Worksheets in the handbook itself are also available so use them to take all your notes and adaptations to adapt the activities to the needs of the students you work with.

“In our endeavour to create quality and effective math instruction, we offer this manual as a collection of contemporary math practices that will improve student learning through a set of activities adapted to their needs.”

Prof. Vesna Makashevska PhD
Faculty of Pedagogy “Sv. Kliment Ohridski” - Skopje
Vice Dean

“I strongly recommend to all lower-grade teachers from the country to visit more often the website of the Step by Step Foundation because it offers a lot of resources useful for our everyday work in the classroom. The math handbook that was published just recently is excellent and covers the topics that we are teaching. It offers interesting math problems with addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, and the illustrations are suitable to the students’ age. So, there is no need to search for additional websites where downloading materials is more complicated. We just need to visit this website regularly to find new and interesting content.”

Sihana Kaba, lower-grade teacher from Kiril i Metodij primary school in Tetovo

“< <<< To download and print the manual, click on the title page or visit our on-line library.

During this period, we also conducted three types of trainings (“How to read, write and have fun”, “Our classroom, our world” and “Math +”) for 67 schools in Macedonia. We are ready for the new academic year and the new schools. By the end of the project all of the primary schools in the country will have gone through the trainings.
Let’s recap: What are learning communities?

The learning communities are non-formal groups of teachers that meet on a regular basis in the school to share experiences, to work on development activities for challenges that they themselves have identified as important and to document their own development in professional development portfolios.

During December and January, the learning communities from 23 primary schools were connected through eight networking meetings organized in several locations: Skopje, Ohrid, Gevgelija and Rosoman. Around 370 participants had the opportunity to share experiences, opinions and to give each other feedback about their development work.

The teachers had expressed their creativity in the development work on the posters designs. The way the posters were created indicates that teachers are not only systematically documenting their professional development but also achieve meaningful results using all of their competencies learned at the numerous workshops and trainings.

www.stepbystep.org.mk
Every learning community has a coordinator. During the networking events the coordinators explained their work in the community, focusing on how they envision their role, what they expect from the LC and how they plan to expand and strengthen the positive influence.

“My goal as a coordinator is to motivate teachers to get involved in the learning community. Once the teachers get involved there is no need for further persuading in the value and benefits from it.”

LC coordinator from PS “Pere Toshev” - Dolneni

Among the other guests that visited the networking meetings there were principals, parents, members of the local community and media, which contributed toward the expanding the visibility of the positive results of achieved by the teachers with regards to literacy and numeracy. The networking events are also an opportunity for teachers to meet and share experiences with their colleagues from other schools in the country.

Networking event in Bratstvo primary school in Karpos gathered representatives from the school, municipality, local media as well as members of the learning communities from PS “Nikola Karev” – Probistip, PS “Hasan Tahsini” – Sedlarevo, Zelino and PS “Dervis Cara” – Dolno Pelciste, Bogovinje

The participants point out that these events strengthen their professional pride that they get inspired to keep working hard and to share their success and dilemmas in a friendly atmosphere that facilitates learning, a model that has to be practiced in every classroom.
As part of USAID Readers are Leaders Project since 2014 we have been organizing workshops where the teachers and parents and sometimes even students create picture books together. In December 2016 we organized these workshops in 41 schools in different parts of the country but this time they had to create pictures covering topics from mathematics. We ended up with beautiful picture books where the main character through the story tries to solve a mathematical problem, where the elements of the picture book are presented through geometrical forms or where students while reading the picture book, practice their number series.

A very important aspect of these workshops is parental involvement and active partnership in creating the picture books. At the workshop in Sv. Kliment Ohridski primary school in Bitola more than 15 mothers created picture books with the teachers. This way the parents had a chance to familiarize themselves more thoroughly with the content taught and the ways in which teachers teach in the classroom so that they can more suitably support their children’s learning at home.

"This is an excellent opportunity to practice an integrative approach in teaching and children, especially the youngest ones, enjoy it." - said a teacher from PS “25. Maj” – Gazi Baba. A teacher from PS “Krste Petkov Misirkov” – Orizari thinks that this approach can also be used in other subjects such as natural or social sciences.

"It was a pleasure as a parent of two lower-grade students to take part in such a workshop. I think that this activity is very useful and easily transferable to the home environment. This way a child’s creativity is being developed, they become more skilled in asking questions, tasks and then think about their answer or solution."

Maja Angelovska, parent from Bitola

During 2017, USAID Readers are Leaders Project will continue organizing such workshops in additional 42 primary school.
Did you hear about Dr. Read?

In December 2016, as part of the USAID Readers are Leaders Project we organized the Facebook Campaign for Healthy Reading Habits. The goal of the campaign was to remind parents of the important role they have in the process of acquiring literacy skills and our main massage was “Let’s read with our children at least 20 minutes a day.”

Doctor Citko, the campaign mascot and a favorite of adults and children alike, shared advices about effective reading and learning every day. Daily tips were shared at the official Facebook pages of USAID Macedonia and Foundation Step by Step, Macedonia.

These advices can help parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles to nurture healthy reading habits while reading and learning with the youngest ones. All of the advices are now available via this Link where you can download them, share them or print them as posters.
In the period between December 12 and 16, a call for photo contributions was set as part of the campaign. The parents and other family members were invited to share photographs of themselves reading with their children and USAID Readers and Leaders Project awarded picture books to every family who shared a photograph.

It was our great pleasure that many schools and public libraries expressed their support for the campaign. They organized reading sessions with parents or students from other classes, actions for book exchange or games with Dr. Citko mascot in the classroom.
To mark the beginning of the second semester of the school year, on January 25 the US Ambassador, Mr. Jess Baily, joined us at the Children’s Creative Center – Skopje and together with the professor and actor Bujar Saiti read picture books with a group of second-graders. It was a truly educational reading session and entertainment with the giant “King Ben” picture book!

We continue to expand the picture book collection with picture books in Turkish language. Last year we published 10 electronic picture books in Turkish and now we add two more to the collection. Visit the digital library www.stepbystep.org.mk to download the picture books and use them with your children.

On December 20, we visited the Center for Rehabilitation for Children with Hearing Impairments, Visual Impairments and Other Developmental Disabilities “Koco Racin” – Bitola with the pop star Dani Dimitrovska and we read picture books with more than 50 children who attend school in the center. Dani, who herself knows some sign language, read two interesting stories from our collection and talked to the students about them. Then we had an opportunity to spend some time outside with the students and employees of the center with the Magic Literacy Van.

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During November and December, we visited several schools with Turkish and Albanian language of instruction with the Magic Literacy Van. The actors Nesrin Tair and Zarije Jonuzi joined us and they read with the students.

After the winter vacation and the beginning of the second semester, our Magic Literacy Van continues to visit the schools primarily in the schools without a school library or the schools in remote rural areas.

If you want the Magic Literacy Van to visit your school or your local community, contact us on 02/3077 – 900 or email us at daniel@stepbystep.org.mk or cell: 072/ 307-328

For additional questions regarding the activities of the USAID Readers are Leaders Project, please contact Ana Dimovska, Information and Communication Officer, through e-mail: ana@stepbystep.org.mk or cell: 072/ 307-321
Both centers for education and support – Dendo Vas in Gjorce Petrov and Nadez in Suto Orizari continued with the many activities with preschool and primary school children. They took part in workshops to create animals out of autumn leaves, workshops for traffic rules and an activity for writing Santa Claus about their New Year’s wishes. Toward the end of the year, Santa Claus visited the and handed them New Year’s packets and on the 26th of December the children visited “Salon 19’19” where they attended a New Year's performance “Santa Claus Loves All of Us.” Additionally, the children receive support in learning and writing homework in the centers on a regular basis.

“My three children visit the ‘Dendo Vas’ center. I am happy with their work and I know that it would be very bad for them and for us if such a center didn’t exist. Here they help them learn and write homework. Aside of children here there are workshops with different topics for us parents. I come to workshops regularly because there are many things that interest me.” – Selvete Demirovska

In order for the children to learn the days of the week and the months of the year, the children in the education centers created this calendar for 2017. You can download and print it via the following link.

[Link to download and print calendar]
The Project for Roma Empowerment and Awareness for Democracy Through Education offers support for the families of preschool and primary school children. These activities are conducted as part of the efforts to strengthen the awareness of women and girls and their rights and the opportunities offered to them about personal development. In the past period informational sessions and lectures with experts from different areas were held, tackling topics such as: the right to take part in elections, social security rights focusing on marginalized women, children and families, informational sessions about access to institutions, procedures and required documents in different sectors.

“The project is good and I want it to continue. My daughter attends the education center “Nadez” where she progresses very well with the help of the educators, because I have difficulties with reading and writing. I personally am involved in the project in classes for literacy and I am very satisfied. I also attend the workshops regularly and I get useful information about myself and the health of my family.”

Sabuhana Jashar

For more information regarding the Project for Roma Empowerment and Awareness for Democracy through Education, contact Elena Mishik, Programme Manager, through e-mail: elena@stepbystep.org.mk or visit the website of the EU Delegation in Macedonia.